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AUTHOR Kamm, Rebecca Ann
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates community college students' and their teachers' perceptions about writing in a beginning composition course. The study explores their views about composition, discusses possible conflicts regarding different ways writing can be defined, and offers suggestions to resolve tension. The means by which educators and students at the community college level approach writing as a classroom subject are described. An ethnographic methodology was used to focus on the complex structure of classroom life. A teacher-as-researcher approach allowed constant interaction between participants and researcher to gain insights on a daily basis. Data collection included observations/field notes, instructor/researcher journals, course materials, student interviews, student records, individual student journals, and written assignments. A four-phase plan was used to analyze student/teacher and student/student relationships. Three main themes were discovered: (1) how students viewed themselves as writers and students on past experiences influenced their present attitudes and behaviors; (2) effective collaboration was important in strengthening a classroom culture; (3) developing goals helped students understand the relevancy and importance of writing. The study is divided into the following five chapters: introduction, review of literature, design of the study, results and analysis, and discussion and implications. Appended is an explanation of coding and category development. (Contains 80 references.) (Author/AS)

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ED 422 037

PERCEPTIONS OF WRITING IN A COMMUNITY COLLEGE COMPOSITION COURSE

An Abstract of a Dissertation

Submitted

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Approved:

_____

Dr. David Landis, Committee Chair

_____

Dr. John Somervill
Dean of the Graduate College

Rebecca Ann Kamm

University of Northern Iowa

July 1998

JC 980 359

R. A. Kamm

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate community college students' and their teacher's perceptions about writing in a beginning composition course. This study explored student and teacher views about composition, possible tensions about ways writing is defined, and ways to resolve tension. Specifically, this study addressed the following questions:

1. How do my perceptions as a writing instructor in a beginning community college composition course compare with my students' perceptions?

2. How do my students and I understand real and perceived consequences that arise from various views about writing?

3. How could my students and I mediate or resolve various views about writing?

This study is important in understanding the ways educators and students at the community college level approach the teaching and learning of writing as a classroom subject. Attention was given to the ways classroom participants view writing, the particular aspects of the process, and the classroom environment in general. Participants consisted of 19 students aged 19 to 24 in one section of a first-year, community college writing course and were enrolled in a variety of majors.

To gain in-depth understanding of the interaction among students and between the teacher and the students, an ethnographic methodology was used to enable a focus on the complex structure of classroom life. A teacher as researcher approach allowed constant interaction between participants and researcher to gain insights on a daily basis. Data

collection included observations/field notes, instructor/researcher journal, course materials, student interviews, student records, individual student journals, and written assignments.

A four-phase plan was used to analyze relationships among students and between students and the teacher. Categories were generated through the constant comparison method, with continual refining and analysis.

Three main themes were discovered through this study.

1. How students viewed themselves as writers and students on past experiences influenced their present attitudes and behaviors.

2. Effective collaboration was important in strengthening a classroom culture.

3. Developing goals helped students understand the relevancy and importance of writing. Findings extend aspects of the literature review by examining community college composition students as more complex than usually described.

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Approved:

_____

Dr. David Landis

_____

Dr. Dale Johnson

_____

Dr. Deborah Tidwell

_____

Dr. Charles Dedrick

_____

Dr. Scott Cawelti

Rebecca Ann Kamm

University of Northern Iowa

July 1998

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

Introduction and Overview

Writing is complex activity. Such activity involves individual reflection, yet fulfills a social purpose. This activity is considered a skill and a dynamic process that is shaped by the writer's purpose and style. Writing is creative, yet defined by conventional structures and mechanics that must be applied to reach one's audience.

Teaching writing is as complex as writing itself. Teachers have been teaching and learning about writing in two main ways. First, a traditional approach views writing as a set of components and structures to be learned. Students begin by copying letters and words and move from separate parts to a whole piece of writing. Typical activities include memorizing parts of speech, completing worksheets of grammatical exercises, memorizing isolated lists of spelling words, and focusing primarily on mechanics and sentence structure. Traditional instruction focuses on discussion of grammar and mechanics, studying sentence structure, and completing drills (Holden, 1994). The teacher's role is to correct mechanical errors and provide a grade, usually after the first draft. Students become expert when they can master the surface-level aspects of a text and apply pieces to whole texts (Carter, 1990).

Second, the process approach emphasizes the search for meaning using more holistic ways of producing a document instead of focusing on sentence-level concerns. Students concentrate on communicating messages and move from a whole idea to parts

which bring a document together. Students use the steps of planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing while considering purpose and audience. Process instruction uses conferences between student and instructor and peer editing with classmates to generate ideas and produce a satisfying text. Teachers provide feedback and support as students produce multiple drafts. Students become expert when they use their creativity and knowledge of the process to write effectively for a variety of purposes and audiences.

Much has been written comparing teaching writing using the traditional versus the process approaches. However, the focus in this dissertation will remain on teaching writing as a process because it is the method I believe is most effective with apprentice writers, and I wanted to closely observe how the process works in my class.

Theorists hold various views regarding writing as a process. Early theorizing that emphasized writing as a cognitive process (Emig, 1971; Flower & Hayes, 1981) focused on the individual writer and his/her basic process as a way of problem solving and emphasized that the teaching of writing should rely on observations of how students write instead of focusing on the product. Flower and Hayes (1981) proposed that steps focusing on thinking or planning, writing or drafting, and revision, occur recursively throughout a period of writing. As they asserted, writers who are more skilled are able to more easily access mental representations of text.

Social theorists discussed the process of constructing knowledge as a member of a classroom community (Calkins, 1983). Donald Graves (1983) emphasized the belief that all students can write if given adequate time and freedom over topic selection and

encouragement so they not only learn how to write well but find enjoyment in the process. Writing is embedded in social activity, and students form communities of writers and readers with the aim of effective communication. Audience awareness is stressed (Elbow, 1991), and students give and receive support from classroom members.

The teacher is an important member of the classroom community and has individual ways of constructing knowledge, considering audience, setting tasks, and developing relationships with students. Since this dissertation views the role of teacher as researcher as an integral part of the study, I will refer to myself in the first person. As a member of the learning community, I have certain beliefs and values that need to be explored as well as analyzing the perceptions of the students in the class. Further development of the teacher as researcher approach will be covered in Chapter 2.

Differences between the traditional and process approaches include the way writing is defined and taught. The traditional approach emphasizes technical correctness and rote activity, while the process approach promotes the importance of communication and thinking activity. Instruction in the traditional approach includes extensive drill to identify and correct mechanical errors and lectures on grammar. Although procedural knowledge is important in the process approach, formal grammar instruction is de-emphasized and replaced by a focus on recursive steps that interact and change as new ideas are accommodated. The use of a single draft in the traditional approach compares with multiple drafts and persistence in the process approach. The teacher using the traditional approach is the classroom authority, while the teacher in the process approach

takes on the role of coach. Students instructed in the traditional approach are assumed to become expert when they use correct grammar, syntax, and mechanics. While grammatical elements are also important in the process approach, student expertise is measured in a product that reflects the use creativity and exploration of meaning throughout several drafts.

Although each view about writing has positive aspects and application for teachers, I do not believe that one stance can be taken that will best fit each student's needs. I believe that each student has an individual writing process based on experience, background, learning style, interest, and goals. My approach attempts to manage and negotiate the traditional and process approaches. In my teaching I attempt to help students use writing for a variety of audiences and purposes. Although emphasis is placed on developing a worthwhile topic that will satisfy the writer and audience, understanding grammatical and mechanical elements is also important for professional writing. Therefore, students should be encouraged to produce multiple drafts as they take an idea and use higher-level thinking skills to create and refine a piece of writing.

Typical activities I use in a beginning writing class include journal writing to produce self-reflection, creating techniques to generate ideas, peer editing groups to encourage support, student/teacher conferences for individual instruction, in-class writings, analysis of textbook essays, and mini-grammatical lessons to match the needs of the students. Assessment includes grades based on both product and process activities and self-assessment from students. My instruction focuses on thinking critically about

writing. As the instructor I try to model effective writing, lead students toward self-discovery, and encourage them to find their own voices. I believe my students become expert when they create documents that are so meaningful to them that they revise their work with an editor's eye until satisfied their documents will be understood and appreciated by their intended audience.

The traditional and process approaches represent two major ways that writing has been defined and valued. Composition theory still debates what writing is and the ways students can best be assisted. Writing instruction is confusing due to a change in paradigm. The teaching of writing continues to be in a state of transition (Tremmel, 1990) with traditional methods being challenged by teachers and researchers favoring the process approach.

This dissertation does not attempt to solve the traditional versus process debate about writing; instead, it describes ways an educator and her students approach teaching and learning of writing as a classroom subject. In particular, my dissertation examines writing in a beginning community college composition course. Although previous research tends to examine instructors' views about writing, I argue that too little attention has been paid to community college students' understandings about writing.

This study represents my attempts to (a) understand my students' views about writing in a beginning community college course and (b) reconcile differing viewpoints and possible tensions between my students and me about writing.

Research Problem and Questions

This section describes the key pieces and foundation of my study. First, I present and describe the research problem. Second, I list questions that guide my study. The background to the research questions, definition of terms, significance of the study, and limitations follow.

The purpose of this study is to investigate community college students' and their teacher's perceptions about writing in a beginning composition course. This study explores student and teacher views about composition, possible tensions within and between students and teachers about ways writing is defined (e.g., traditional versus process approach), and ways to resolve tension.

The research problem and questions for this study result from juxtaposing two propositions (Guba, 1978) about writing in a beginning community college composition course. The first statement proposes that I as the instructor value writing as an important activity, both personally and professionally. As an instructor, I realize that students will often be judged by their writing ability throughout their educational experiences and careers. The second statement proposes that many of my community college students do not agree with my views. My students often enter their first community college writing class with resentment toward writing. They question why they should take such a course and state that writing has no relevance to their present circumstances or future plans. Students indicate that they have experienced little academic success in this area in the past and appear to find writing unrewarding. Due to differing views, the teaching of

writing in a community college beginning composition course is conceptually problematic for the instructor and the students.

The research problem is defined as a situation which results from juxtaposition of the two propositions stated above. A conclusion about the two propositions can be stated in the following way: *Even though I as the instructor value writing and believe it is a valuable skill, some of my students think writing is not rewarding.* A broad research question can be derived from this research problem. Given perplexing, conceptually complicated views about writing, how can instructor and student views be reconciled in a community college beginning composition course? This broad question can be divided into three specific research questions. Specifically, this study will address the following questions:

1. How do my perceptions as a writing instructor in a beginning community college composition course compare with my students' perceptions?

2. How do my students and I understand real and perceived consequences that arise from various views about writing?

3. How could my students and I mediate or resolve various views about writing?

Background to the Research Questions

This section describes boundaries of my study. Each question is discussed in order to provide focus to the study.

The first question of the study is, "How do my perceptions as a writing instructor in a beginning community college composition course compare with my students'

perceptions?" In order to maintain a focus regarding my students' writing perceptions, I limited my research to a community college course. I considered my beliefs about writing and how they have influenced my teaching of writing. Although I expected to hear student comments regarding their studies in general, I focused directly on students' perceptions in a beginning writing course.

To address this question, I documented how the students and I defined writing and what each of us felt should be elements of a community college beginning composition course. It was important to analyze what students did in the classroom, especially during the first few weeks (e.g., where they positioned themselves, their body language, and their comments during class discussion). I realized the way I focused my attention might differ from the focus of the students. In particular I needed to record my perceptions as a person with extensive training and experience in learning, practicing, and teaching writing, while my students' perceptions were based on their experience with writing.

The second question of my study is, "How do my students and I understand real and perceived consequences that arise from various views about writing?" This question relates to how consequences developed as well as what the consequences were by analyzing the chains of events that led to various views about writing and specific consequences for students and myself.

In any classroom situation there is a possibility for tensions of various types to develop. Such tensions might develop between student and teacher, among students, within students, and within the teacher (particularly dealing with teaching philosophy).

Tensions may exist due to confusion brought about by the opposing views of the traditional and process approach when students have been introduced to both approaches as well as prior success or failure with writing itself.

I value writing and activities in the class as positive aspects that will contribute to professional success. In contrast, some students in the study felt that it was important to complete activities solely to receive credit for graduation. Consequences of differing values may result in the feeling of isolation, misunderstanding instructor evaluation and assessment, tensions resulting from an unfamiliar learning environment, writers' block, and using teaching materials that appear inadequate. I as the teacher focused on the improvement of writing accomplished by students, while some students focused on receiving a passing or high grade. The consequences of my misunderstanding students could result in tensions that may cause rifts in student/teacher relationships and lessen cohesiveness in the classroom. Consequences for students misunderstanding what I value as important could include lower grades or dropping out of the course.

The third research question is, "How could my students and I mediate or resolve various views about writing?" I explored patterns of any tensions, observed times that tensions were apparent and when they did not exist, and ways that resolution could occur.

In order to address this question, I needed to carefully explore the goals of the students and myself to discover what we felt was important. Generating discussion and asking students about their views directly provided valuable information. Activities that provided clues regarding resolution included journal entries, changes in assigned essays,

and observation of group work. In addition, although I believe that resolving tensions is important, students might not have felt it was worth their time or effort to make such resolutions. Resolution for students included valuing the writing process, willingness to express feelings and opinions, acceptance of writing as an important skill, and transforming student/teacher relationships. As the instructor resolution for me included changing class activities, gaining insights about my students, and varying my original beliefs about students' perceptions about writing.

Definition of Terms

This section clarifies discussion regarding student and instructor views about writing in a beginning community college composition course. Key terms include natural setting, writing, community college, beginning community college composition class, perceptions, and tensions. The following definitions will be used:

A natural setting is a "non-contrived environment" (Guba, 1978, p. 16); e.g., a regular classroom. For the purpose of this study, research will focus on the daily life of one classroom where the setting is not experimental. A typical classroom differs from a laboratory setting because, although well planned, flexibility will allow information to emerge as instruction progresses.

Writing is defined by my experiences and teaching practices. For all practical purposes my working definition of writing is (a) a cognitive, social process that is ongoing, and (b) a set of procedures for planning, drafting, revising, and editing, and (c) a set of printed grammatical conventions accepted by other people as regular and

predictable patterns of language, and (d) a critical thinking process as students give shape to an idea and make it interesting and understandable to an audience.

A community college is defined by the U.S. Department of Education as an institution of higher education "accredited by an agency recognized by the Department of Education offering an associate degree as the highest award" (Phillippe, 1995, p. viii). The Iowa Code (260C2) defines community college as,

> a publicly supported school which may offer programs of adult and continuing education, lifelong learning, community education, and up to two years of liberal arts, preprofessional, or occupational instruction partially fulfilling the requirements for a baccalaureate degree but confers no more than an associate degree; or which offers as the whole or as part of the curriculum up to two years of vocational or technical education, training, or retraining to persons who are preparing to enter the labor market.

A beginning community college composition class is the first-year writing course and prerequisite for more advanced writing courses. Most post-secondary institutions have a similar course. In a beginning course students often use creating techniques and collaborative efforts to produce manuscripts. They consider purpose and audience as they develop a first draft and learn to apply rules of grammar and punctuation during revision stages. Typically students write personal or opinion essays as they prepare to enhance writing for educational and career purposes.

Perceptions are the ways people view topics, ideas, or feelings. Perceptions include how people have achieved understanding of the kinds of individuals they have become and what they observe to hold meaning and value.

Tensions are situations in which there is disagreement or concern. Classroom tensions consist of situations that may affect student performance by lessening cohesiveness, inhibiting learning, or causing frustration.

Consequences are the results or effects that follow an action or way of thinking. In a classroom some consequences may be real, defined as measurable or similar to all persons involved. Other consequences may be perceived, defined as inaccurate to some individuals in the classroom environment but logical to the thinker.

Mediate means to take differing views, discuss them from each person's perspective, and bring about a compromise. Mediation can be accomplished only when all parties are open to change and want to resolve concerns. A classroom situation might involve teacher- or student-initiated mediation. Sometimes a third party is included such as a counselor or administrator.

Resolve means to reach an agreement or solution or to draw successful conclusion to a course of action. Classroom resolutions often result as students and teachers dispel doubts about each other, develop understanding and respect for each other's views, and produce a unified sense of community.

Significance of Study

Investigating community college students' and their instructor's perceptions about writing and the writing classroom is important for three reasons. First, there has been too little attention paid to community college students' views about writing, and students are put in the position of having to reconcile differing approaches to writing. Conclusions

and findings from this study extend what is known about community college students' views about writing.

Second, many studies about writing typically examine one aspect of composition such as writing across the curriculum, using computers for composition, revision strategies, student collaboration, assessment of writing, and grammatical concerns. The findings described in this study promote a significant direction for new research because the focus on students' views represents a broader view of composition than is usually proposed in the research.

Third, since writing is considered important for community college students' academic and employment success, how writing is taught continues to be a topic of concern. Researching writing can help improve instruction about composition in community colleges. Better understanding of students' perceptions can help strengthen community college composition programs and focus available resources in ways that encourage students' uses of writing for further study, employment, and personal satisfaction.

Limitations of the Study

There are three main limitations to this study. First, the population is limited to one writing classroom during one semester with a particular group of students without knowing if students' perceptions differ in other classes. Students' perceptions and observations about writing are likely to differ from class to class, semester to semester,

and instructor to instructor. Therefore, there is limited opportunity to generalize results of this study to other composition courses in other locations.

Second, my stance toward writing is just one way to look at composition. Other definitions, stances, and approaches to teaching writing exist (e.g., Elbow, 1981; Graves, 1983; Hillocks, 1986; Scardmalia & Bereiter, 1986).

Third, other limitations result from the types of data analysis and my role in the study as a teacher/researcher. The research methods used in this study may not always engage participants to disclose their perceptions honestly. For example, my perceptions are influenced as to how students perceive me as a teacher. Students' disclosure might reflect on what they feel would be an appropriate answer to provide me as instructor. Since I am both the instructor of the class and the researcher, bias may exist due to my wanting students to achieve success. Details of my roles and data analysis I employ are discussed in Chapter 3.

Each of these limitations is important to consider. Understanding limitations can provide parameters in completing and evaluating a study. However, using methodology directly applicable to the classroom will enable me to gather data and insights not available through other methods. Exploring community college students' views about writing in a beginning composition course can generate alternative hypotheses for understanding what students are learning about writing. Furthermore, conclusions based on the study of a single classroom can be used to promote a broader understanding of writing perceptions within the context of the wider educational community.

Conclusion

Since writing is complex activity, it is important to review varied aspects in an attempt to enhance teacher and student understanding. In particular, it's important to examine how previous training and perceptions of writing affect community college students possessing low socioeconomic status and difficulty with academic study. In order to provide detailed information regarding writing, discover how people view writing, and examine problems involved in the writing classroom, Chapter 2 reviews the literature of several areas that connect with the research questions. Chapter 2 examines the writing difficulties of students, particular concerns about nontraditional students, culture and communication in the classroom, and the unique role of teacher as researcher.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In order to provide further background and begin insights into discussion of the research questions of this study, this chapter reviews the literature of four specific areas. The first area of review examines writing apprehension and factors which shape student attitude toward writing. This area of review addresses the first two research questions, How do my perceptions as a writing instructor in a beginning community college composition course compare with my students' perceptions? and How do my students and I understand real and perceived consequences that arise from various views about writing?

Although not all students perceive writing to be difficult, and some students feel positive toward writing, students may have developed apprehension or feel less comfortable with some aspects of the writing process due to a variety of influences. Students and teachers have different ways to define writing. Varied perceptions and consequences may arise from the ways writing has been influenced in the past.

The second area of review deals with particular concerns about nontraditional students that often attend community colleges. This population is of interest because it differs from the type of students who traditionally have attended four-year institutions. This area of review addresses the first research question, How do my perceptions as a writing instructor in a beginning community college composition course compare with my students' perceptions?

The varied experience and background of community college students produce unique perceptions that are important to explore. Nontraditional learners can be divided into several categories, creating a complex student population. Some students have been distanced from educational environments for several years, and their perceptions may be limited by lack of experience or family encouragement.

The third area of review, culture and communication in the classroom, develops discussion regarding the classroom environment, particularly at community colleges. This background is especially necessary because the study presents a holistic view of all participants within a semester-long class. This area of review addresses the first and second research questions, How do my perceptions as a writing instructor in a beginning community college composition course compare with my students' perceptions? and How do my students and I understand real and perceived consequences that arise from various views about writing?

Researching classroom culture and communication is important because it explains how participants form communities as they engage in new situations, try different activities, and relate to unfamiliar people. Interaction, including the ways people talk, behave, and follow the social expectations of the class, is necessary to understand how misunderstandings or communication competence develop.

The unique role of teacher as researcher, the fourth area of literature reviewed, is important in providing a rationale for the type of study being conducted. Constant interaction and personal contact between participants and researcher in a real classroom

setting should increase participants' level of comfort. Since the teacher is an integral part of the class, acting as the teacher as researcher can assist in gaining insights on a daily, low-risk basis. This area of review addresses the second and third research questions, How do my students and I understand real and perceived consequences that arise from various views about writing? and How could my students and I mediate or resolve various views about writing?

Viewing the classroom in a formal manner can unfold information directly from the individuals involved. Using the teacher as researcher approach provides an insider view that allows active participation to best understand the realities of the people involved.

The four areas of review are important in viewing a writing class and its participants holistically. The research is intended to expand discussion important to writing, student and teacher perceptions, and resolution of various views about writing in a classroom environment.

Writing Influences

Composing is a complicated task which can not be mastered by a series of straightforward exercises. Many aspects of teaching and learning influence writing behaviors, performance, and attitudes. Even though many students at all educational levels enjoy writing, find it creative, and use writing for personal reflection and professional purposes (Calkins, 1994), studies have shown that a sizable portion of students experience difficulty during one or more areas of writing (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1986).

A consequence of inappropriate or inadequate writing can be writing apprehension, defined by Daly and Wilson (1983) as "a situation and subject specific individual difference associated with a person's tendencies to approach or avoid situations perceived to potentially require writing accompanied by some amount of perceived evaluation" (p. 327). Students who are highly apprehensive about composition find writing unrewarding and punishing, thereby avoiding writing situations whenever possible. They experience anxiety when required to write, which affects attitudes about composing. In common terms, they do not like to write. Writing apprehension can affect "satisfaction in coursework requiring writing, expectations of success in future writing courses, enrollment in advanced composition classes, and enjoyment of out-of-class projects" which require writing (Daly & Wilson, 1983, p. 328).

Writing apprehension can result for a number of reasons. Concentrating on the physical act of forming letters, believing that writing should be completed in isolation from other people, negative criticism, unsupportive learning environments, writer's block, confining writing only to English classes, and inadequate teacher preparation contribute to student fears about writing. These areas of apprehension may not necessarily connect to all community college students or participants in the study, but reflect research that others have done in documenting writing difficulties of students. The following areas represent possible concerns related to writing and consequences that can occur due to inexperience, misperception, or lack or preparation for "real" writing. For the purposes of this study,

areas are addressed that might cause students to feel discomfort with writing in general or in separate stages of the writing process.

Physical Causes

One of the first causes of writing apprehension might be related to the physical act of writing itself. For a child learning to write, the act of forming words may be the "dominant and absorbing activity" (Emig, 1978, p. 62). The child may attend to the formation of letters, rather than the message. As children mature and receive varied instruction in writing, several obstacles may produce negative attitudes or prevent students from developing into expert writers.

Another physical cause of apprehension might be related to required computer usage. Although the use of computers has been found to produce more favorable attitudes toward writing due to expanded ease in revision (Williamson, 1993), adult students without developed typing skills continue to find the physical act of writing tedious. The extra time that must be spent on writing activities and the slowness of the process can cause students to lose interest or forget ideas. They indicate that writing is time consuming, especially if they must first become somewhat proficient at word processing since most colleges require typed assignments. Due to the low socioeconomic levels of many students, they cannot afford to purchase computers and must spend further time from their families to use college computer labs.

Writing Isolation

Students who perceive writing to be an independent activity may feel writing is an isolated skill. A study by Louth, McAllister, and McAllister (1993) indicated that students learning in collaborative conditions (defined as "more than one person contributing to the process") were more pleased with their achievement than independent writers (p. 217). Students working independently experienced less enjoyment and confidence in their writing than students in collaborative groups.

According to Palmer, Hafner, and Sharp (1994) students working cooperatively in groups can discuss their writing problems and possible solutions, share ideas, develop risk taking characteristics, and assimilate knowledge of different cultures and subject matter. Students who write collaboratively can become better writers due to the active process which involves sharing drafts, focusing on content, and searching for clarity of meaning. In other words, students learn from each other.

Students who work constantly in isolation often view writing as a competitive activity as classmates vie for high grades. At community colleges the result of writing isolation includes fear of volunteering for discussion, initial hesitancy to work in groups, and reluctance to ask classmates for assistance.

Revision

Students who use revision solely to make mechanical or surface changes or who do not see value in revision, tend to display negative attitudes toward writing. Although revision is seen by teachers as the most important part of the writing process, many students

"stubbornly refuse to conceive of revision as anything but a sentence-level activity" (Sullivan, 1986, p. 52) and are unable to reexamine elements in a document they have written.

Polanski (1985) discovered that the revision and reorganization strategies of most college freshmen composition students in her study did not compare to the extent that is used by experienced and professional writers. Inexperienced writers often believe that the first draft is the finished product and resent making any changes.

Students who focus strictly on mechanics during revision see grammatical aspects as "principles to be learned, but their artificiality leads students to an awkward, uncommitted imitation of what,writers do, thereby making frustration and disinterest more likely than growth" (Knoblauch & Brannon, 1984, p. 91). Revision therefore is viewed as a tedious waste of time and becomes a punishment.

In addition, the focus on rhetoric does not always work in modern classrooms because students become preoccupied with form and rigid structures, limiting development of perceiving dissonance in their own writing. The outcome is artificial writing when students are expected to emulate writings of others rather than think for themselves (Knoblauch & Brannon, 1984).

Many students at the community college level have had little experience with writing or have been out of school for many years and have forgotten revision techniques. Other students possess the misperception that the initial draft, not revision, is the most important part of the writing process. Consequences that occur when revision is missing or

minimal include student dissatisfaction with grades, underdeveloped assignments, and teacher disappointment of student progress.

Evaluation and Assessment

Evaluation is another area of concern regarding writing apprehension. Since students often misunderstand teachers' written remarks, Sullivan (1986) suggested being careful when offering praise because students may wrongly believe their instructors are praising their ideas when comments in reality are directed toward offering solace. Students receive a "false sense of their capacity and achievement" and become "less willing to accept constructive criticism" (p. 51).

Sullivan (1986) suggested that students become "incapacitated by too much negative criticism" when instructor comments "point out what a student has not done completely, not done effectively, or not done at all" (p. 52). Powers, Cook, and Meyer (1979) discovered that "typical detailed composition criticism given in a basic composition course may have served the highly apprehensive students as a reinforcement of their negative reaction" (p. 229). Walsh (1989) concurred that such students perceived evaluation as "undermining their confidence and discouraging their future efforts" (p. 7).

Hurlow (1993) discussed "evaluation anxiety," where students fear their writing will not meet expectations of the teacher and therefore not take risks. Such anxiety is especially apparent in classrooms where the teacher is the sole judge in evaluating quality of writing (Hamp-Lyons, 1994).

Traditional evaluation might be used to measure only the technical aspects of writing, even though students might be progressing in other ways (Knoblauch & Brannon, 1984). One reason for such evaluation is that mechanical aspects may be viewed as more easily measurable (Fagan, 1989). A consequence of such evaluation may be that students avoid grammatical structures that are difficult instead of experimenting so their manuscripts are not marked as wrong. Even when teachers state that the quality of ideas is emphasized more than accuracy of expression, students may still report that grammatical elements carry as much weight in grading as content (Applebee, Langer, Mullis, Latham, & Gentile, 1994).

During student/teacher conferences, problems can occur when the teacher controls the direction of inquiry; students do not have enough time to thoroughly think through questions and provide answers (Johnson, 1993), and teachers dominate discussion without providing students with new skills (Taylor, 1993). Teacher-directed questioning can be confusing for students because questions can change their train of thought (Johnson, 1993). Also, teachers are sometimes unwilling to share responsibility with students (Taylor, 1993), causing students to become overly dependent on teachers or producing learned helplessness (Bass, 1993).

Assessment that includes "multiple-choice questions about someone else's writing" or a "single writing sample produced in a limited time period is an unfair measure of writing ability and yields little or no indication of students' understanding of the processes of writing" (O'Brien, 1992, p. 28). Such assessment is, however, promoted by test developers and "traditionalists" who view writing as a "solitary task" that is easily tested (O'Brien,

1992, p. 28). Although a multiple-choice test on correct grammatical usage takes less time to grade than an essay, for example, it is not a true indicator of students' writing abilities.

Even when students are assessed directly by writing samples, usually they are provided a writing prompt and "expected to write a proficient essay under time constraints" sending the message that students "do not need time to think and work at their writing and that revision is not important" (O'Brien, 1992, p. 28). Such contradictions do not allow students to use process writing skills (Applebee, 1991) and cause confusion for developing writers.

Students also become confused as they take classes with several teachers, each with different conceptions of good writing (Meikle, 1982). When assessment is focused on the product, students do not learn to evaluate themselves, have less confidence in themselves as writers, and write for the teacher as sole audience (Hamp-Lyons, 1994).

Community college students are sometimes resentful of evaluative comments from instructors because they perceive evaluation negatively as personal criticism instead of positively as helpful critique. In addition, they are not used to evaluating themselves or their peers and therefore feel uncomfortable in this role. Often they lack training in evaluation and do not understand the value and purpose of instructor assessment.

Grammar Emphasis

According to Janet Emig (1978), discussion about the basics of writing "is not only confused but, even more ironic, frivolous. Capitalization, spelling, punctuation--these are

touted as the basics in writing when they represent, of course, merely the conventions, the amenities for recording the outcome of the process" (p. 59).

Rather than realizing writing as the discovery of meaning or communication to a real audience, students have been led to believe that writing consists solely of conventions and mechanics. When writing is taught as "a mechanical act of selecting prefabricated forms for preconceived content" or as "technical skills to be delivered by masters to apprentices" (Knoblauch & Brannon, 1984, p. 4), students perceive that grammatical correctness should be the desired outcome of writing courses (Meikle, 1982).

Although use of appropriate grammar and mechanics are certainly necessary in "good" writing, problems can occur when students misunderstand the initial importance of these concerns. Inexperienced writers may lack practice in coordinating the complex processes of communication (including listening, speaking, reading, and writing) and may not have developed an inner voice to check all aspects that could hinder clarity. "The developing writer may get discouraged with the mechanical processes before adequately thinking through the meaning to be communicated" (Palmer et al., 1994, p. 85).

Community college students often enter their first college writing course believing that they will be studying grammar and are sometimes surprised to discover the real-life, sometimes personal writing required in most process-oriented classes. Students who have not mastered the understanding and usage of correct grammar throughout high school are not apt to benefit from similar teaching strategies, but may initially find the process-oriented

classroom confusing because the importance of grammar is secondary to having something worthwhile to say.

Learning Environment

Inappropriate grouping and instruction can be another deterrent to writing success, especially when "all students may be expected to learn in ways similar to learners who typically succeed in U.S. schools" leading to "teachers' approaches being incompatible with learners' perspectives or styles of learning" (Manning & Baruth, 1995, p. 27). People can "short-circuit the potential of others merely by expecting less of them than they are capable of producing" (Palmer et al., 1994, p. 21).

Manning and Baruth (1995) described problem learning environments as including irrelevant curriculum, using instructional approaches that cultivate competition, tracking or ability grouping, and inflexible management practices. They suggested employing cooperative learning, grouping patterns other than ability grouping, individualized instruction, contract learning, and classroom management practices that develop harmony over using control. Rather than using solely traditional classrooms, there is a need for alternative learning environments and interactions.

Traditional classrooms have been teacher directed, "characterized by the teacher's standing at the head of the class, telling students what to do" (Knudson, 1990, p. 91). Instead of expecting students to take major responsibility for their work, "the teacher assumes part of the job of processing information and helping students decide upon and organize ideas" (p. 91) resulting in dependence on teachers and difficulty in internalizing

the process. As Burrow (1989) discovered, some community college students expect their instructors to help them compensate for writing deficiencies and do not take responsibility for their own writing improvement.

The teacher becomes the holder of knowledge and maintains complete control of the classroom as the authority figure (Meikle, 1982). The lack of student empowerment develops when teachers maintain control over the writing classroom by "telling students what topics to write about, what type of arguments to use, how to structure the essay, and what type of sentences to create" (Metzer & Bryant, 1993, p. 285). By maintaining power over how writing is taught and controlling student texts, teachers suppress ideas and silence voices (Metzer & Bryant, 1993). Students become stifled in their need to develop creativity and be allowed choices and do not feel an interest in taking control of their own learning. A student can become "a passive receptacle who is simply told to perform a prescribed intellectual function or to reproduce the thinking of the teacher" (Taylor, 1993, pp. 27, 30).

When a narrow view of writing is imposed, students may become confused and develop feelings of powerlessness in school (Fagan, 1989). In addition, the use of worksheets and assignments without meaning for students creates passive learners. Students' mental capacities are not challenged, and school work becomes no more than manual work whereby students concentrate on tasks of filling in blanks. Lessons may lack meaning outside the classroom. Students "are merely requested to follow the procedures indicated by the teacher; the teacher is perceived as the ultimate goal for engaging in

reading and writing activities," causing confusion and dependence on the classroom context (Fagan, 1989, p. 576).

When a classroom is structured in this manner, "its artificiality and the imposed nature of assignments debilitate intrinsic motivation and bring extrinsic factors to the fore" (Williams & Alden, 1983, p. 101). Results include students viewing writing as unimportant, lacking motivation to enroll in any composition class not required for a degree, putting low value on writing ability, having little desire to improve writing skills, lacking interest in teacher comments, and believing writing has little practical application (Williams & Alden, 1983). Extrinsically motivated students "are motivated more by a fear of failure than by a desire to seek and enjoy success. Their belief that writing cannot be taught is therefore an attempt to cope with this fear by placing the whole activity beyond the scope of personal potential--that is, writers are born, not made" (Williams & Alden, 1983, p. 110).

Community college students who have previously felt a lack of empowerment in school may come to the classroom expecting to take little responsibility for their learning. They depend on teachers for writing and revision ideas, lack confidence in their skills, feel their background knowledge is of little interest to peers, and do not realize their creative abilities. Although on the surface they may appear to be compliant, they may in reality fear disclosure about themselves and are afraid to add to class discussion or explore new directions in writing.

Writer's Block

Writer's block, the inability to generate words on paper, can result in rushed assignments, late papers, and grades that do not accurately measure writing ability (Rose, 1980). Blocking can be caused by writing strategies that hinder the process, rigid attention to rules, or inflexibility and result in "a growing distrust" of abilities and "an aversion toward the composing process" (Rose, 1980, p. 389). Anticipation of failure (including low grades and poor writing products), competition among peers for high grades, and confusion regarding teacher expectations can also cause writer's block (Bass, 1993).

Effective writing involves discovery, which can be frightening for students who stare at an empty page not knowing what to say and believing they have nothing of importance to impart (Murray, 1978). The fear of self-disclosure becomes an issue when students believe that "one's language indicates the state not only of one's mind, but also of one's soul" (Sledd, 1993, p. 2).

Surface-level errors can therefore make students feel stupid and worthless. The result of believing they have nothing worthwhile to say and fearing the making of grammatical errors will cause ridicule can lead students to avoid the discomfort of trying to fill a blank page with words.

At the community college level, students can not afford to spend time waiting for inspiration or continual false starts on assignments. Waiting until the last moment to begin assignments usually results in minimal work and a self-fulfilling prophecy of students'

expectations of their abilities. Consequences might include students quickly falling behind, becoming confused, and dropping out of the class.

Confines of Writing

Langer and Applebee (1987) discussed two widely held assumptions about writing: it is "primarily the job of the English teacher, who should be teaching the generic strategies," and "writing within other subjects has no fundamental relationship to the teaching of those subjects" (p. 150). Even when students are writing, assignments may not require in-depth exploration. The 1992 NAEP study (Applebee, et al., 1994) discovered that 52% of the 8th graders and 37% of the 12th graders reported never or hardly ever were given writing assignments of longer than three or more pages.

The consequence of community college student perception that writing is only for English classes is the inability to transfer knowledge of writing to other situations. Writing may be perceived as solely an academic subject not connected to real life. The lack of writing practice in other subjects can limit students' experiences in writing for varied audiences and purposes.

Teacher Preparation

Knoblauch and Brannon (1984) stated there is an historical problem of "a disjunction between the traditional academic preparation teachers have received and the demands of the work they are called upon to do" (p. 2). Many teachers trained in English departments where literature has been emphasized have not received in-depth training about writing process.

In addition, disagreement exists regarding academic preparation for teacher candidates. Some undergraduates themselves are not required to write at length, and teacher preparation programs in the past have often been based on generic, mechanical teaching skills which leave little room for individual ownership or creativity (Myers, 1991).

Teachers at community colleges, especially those in vocational and technical areas, may not be trained in writing themselves and therefore do not require writing from their students. Students who write only in their English classrooms do not have the opportunity to expend enough time on writing and realize the relevance of writing to their intended professions. Although many community college teachers have received adequate preparation in their subject area, teacher training usually focuses on K-12 levels. Teachers seldom take courses that prepare them to handle the particular problems and concerns of the community college populatioa.

Materials

Some teachers depend on others to help develop the writing behaviors of their students and follow a set of publishers' curriculum materials (Fagan, 1989). Using basal texts and materials set by textbook companies can result in lack of connection between the text and real experiences of learners. Students also begin to equate literacy with dull textbooks and do not see other types of reading as valid in academic settings.

Teaching materials packaged by publishers can cause little student/teacher interaction and discussion because students are often expected to focus on a worksheet or

textbook (Myers, 1991). The result is loss of creativity, less confidence in expressing one's ideas, and little sense of ownership.

Summary

This section relates to the first two research questions: How do my perceptions as a writing instructor in a beginning community college composition course compare with my students' perceptions? and How do my students and I understand real and perceived consequences that arise from various views about writing? Viewing writing influences (including the physical act of forming letters, believing that writing is an isolated activity, criticism, learning environments, writer's block, confining writing to English classes, and inadequate teacher preparation), provides reasons for students' development of particular perceptions. When perceptions of students and their teacher vary, discomfort in writing may occur, and the student/teacher relationship may not be fulfilling. Expectations of writing and the classroom setting may not match reality, and confusion could result.

Nontraditional Learners

Nontraditional learners, or students who enter college after being out of high school for several years, have special problems with writing and learning. "Often older students are painfully aware of the difference between their writing abilities and those of expert writers, and seek the simplest, most risk-free means of reducing that difference" (Hurlow, 1993, p. 62).

Also, older students enter college with different reasons than typical 18-year- old students. Older students might be pursuing personal interests or beginning new, mid-life

careers. "Initial . . . academic endeavor" presents these students with "personal, organizational, and academic problems that can lead to their growth or their failure" (Dobie, 1992, p. 4), especially when coupled with financial considerations that require "social, family or other sacrifices" (p. 5).

The literature describes several special types of nontraditional students who may attend community colleges. Needham (1994) describes the "Model Student," which includes many older students who attend college for intellectual stimulation and strongly believe in lifelong learning. These students possess extensive background knowledge and experience. However, they might initially feel intimidated by the college environment.

A second type of student, labeled the "Lost Children" by Needham (1994), have potential for success but are unsure of the future. They often come to college immediately from high school, but may also have spent some time in the work force. They often miss class, come late, have little motivation, ignore school restrictions, lack self-control, and are underprepared.

A third type of community college student is the "Adult Woman" who experiences outside pressures of home, family, work, and spousal opposition. Many of these women come from backgrounds where academic success is not recognized or considered valuable and expect to fail (Morrison, 1994). They often need encouragement to redefine themselves as students.

Other students enroll primarily for vocational training and are not oriented toward academics (Barrett & Wootten, 1994), thereby resenting general education requirements as

"unreasonable obstacles placed in their path" (McGrath & Spear, 1991, p. 24). The repeated emphasis on skill level in some vocational classes can further negatively impact students' perceptions about more holistic writing classes.

The complexity of this student population may cause difficulty in community college classrooms due to the wide variety of abilities and concerns. Negative attitudes and false assumptions about writing carried to college from high school may also be difficult to overcome. However, since most students are excited about their opportunities to attend college, they can often be persuaded to accept the challenges involved in expanding writing skills.

Due to the nature of the subject, effective communication and development of a positive classroom culture is an important part of any composition course. All colleges and universities require at least one English course that involves writing. Writing courses are designed to improve students' skills in preparation for other academic coursework and employment, as well as personal improvement and satisfaction. Students' writing skills are measured for "admission, placement, course equivalency, junior status, exit from courses, or barriers from graduation" (Brand, 1992, p. 2). At the community college level, students often enter their first writing course with resentment. They might indicate that writing has no relevance to their present, future, or intended profession. In addition, students in introductory courses may possess a lack of basic skills and "defeatist attitudes toward their composing abilities and the act of writing itself" (Fox, 1980, p. 39).

Differences between how writing is taught and ways students perceive writing can therefore point to reasons why some community college students fear writing. The traditional grammatical approach once common in composition classrooms is not always desirable in a society where writers need to develop complex thinking, problem solving, and decision making skills (Palmer et al., 1994). Instruction concentrating on grammar and mechanics confuses students who lack skills in composing for an audience and discovering meaning (Zamel, 1982). Writing apprehension sometimes develops in students who write without meaning, causing them to find writing unrewarding (Daly & Wilson, 1983).

Summary

This area of research views concerns about nontraditional students attending community colleges in order to answer the first research question, How do my perceptions as a writing instructor in a beginning community college composition course compare with my students' perception? Perceptions vary depending on learning and writing background, reasons for enrollment, and goals. Types of community college students include older students attending for intellectual stimulation, those unsure of the future, adult women with family pressures, and students oriented toward vocational training. This diverse population includes a variety of attitudes and ideas regarding composition and education.

Classroom Culture and Communication

In any classroom situation, students from various backgrounds suddenly find themselves in a new environment. Since humans are social by nature and all classes involve degrees of collaboration, students need to relate to each other "in accordance with

certain norms and conventions" involving "distinct yet interrelated levels of explanation, none of which are necessarily mutually exclusive" (Heron, 1982, p. 21). New communities are formed as students discover different ways of relating to situations and people.

According to Goodenough (1981), "A person's membership in a culture-sharing group is determined by the extent to which he reveals himself as competent in the standards we attribute to other members of the group" (p. 100). In a writing classroom, certain pre-existing expectations (e.g., difficulty expressing opinions, lack of experience in writing, or use of incorrect and confusing format) may immediately mark a student as differing from the norm and therefore alienate him as a viable member of the class. However, an effective classroom environment promotes the development of a shared culture that accepts all students in the class and values their opinions and backgrounds. This goal is not easy since dimensions of classroom life are complex and include the language people use, the unwritten and unspoken rules for participating set forth, the expected and displayed behavior, and the types of interactions among people. However, examining the dynamic ways participants interact and exploring how classroom participants judge behavior and talk that is acceptable and unacceptable can provide insight into the development of classroom culture (Mehan, 1982) and the views of students and teachers.

On the one hand, teachers must plan lessons, make assignments, and regulate student behavior. They must possess competence not only in the subject area but also in structuring the environment. Teachers' decisions are based on their perceptions of

students--"who they are and what they need to know" (Applebee, 1991, p. 550).

On the other hand, students' perceptions of effective writing are impacted by the expectations and beliefs of their teacher (Fang, 1996). Real learning may be difficult to measure because students and teachers may have developed different definitions of what constitutes learning (Green & Bloome, 1997).

In order for effective communication to exist, interactions between teachers and students should be "rhythmic, cooperative activities, involving the complex coordination of speech and gesture" (Mehan, 1982, p. 72). Participants shift language patterns and behavior during different contexts of the class. Therefore, the dynamic setting forces students to interpret their status as circumstances change and respond to the actions of others (Tuyay, Floriani, Yeager, Dixon, & Green, 1995).

Classrooms in which teachers share authority with students can result in expanded learning for the teacher as well as the students (Morrison, 1994). In addition, such openness gives the message that students may easily approach the teacher to voice concerns. Positive changes in student attitude often occur when students and their teacher use a collaborative process (Fantine, 1990). The teacher can provide "an orderly, coherent set of experiences, each of which is flexible enough to provide the appropriate degrees of challenge and support to students whose knowledge and skills may differ widely from each other" (Applebee, 1991, p. 551). By accommodating the special needs of each student in the class, teachers can help retain hesitant students and provide encouragement.

One of the most important aspects of classroom culture is the pattern of communication used by the participants (Saville-Troike, 1982). Students use language "to achieve academic and social goals, to learn, and to participate in everyday activities of the classroom and other educational settings and events" (Green, 1983, p. 184). In addition, a classroom is "a dynamic communicative setting in which students and teachers are constantly monitoring what is occurring and how it is occurring" (Green, 1983, p. 187). As students communicate in a classroom setting, they reveal both social organization and cultural meanings (Carbaugh, 1994; McDermott & Hood, 1982). Patterns of the time, length, and choice of speech can provide insight into the way people communicate following cultural and social rules (Carbaugh, 1994).

Social organization is important in classrooms as participants communicate to create relationships, position themselves socially, define roles, create identities, and order social life. The nature and function of communication can vary depending on the situation (Carbaugh, 1994), and students must be able to correctly perceive, select, and interpret aspects of communication codes in order to effectively interact with others (Saville-Troike, 1982). Individuals in a classroom situation are also involved in displaying to a group their abilities and weaknesses which are open to interpretation by peers and instructor (McDermott & Hood, 1982). The method of communication chosen thereby has important social weight (Carbaugh, 1994). Only through communication can individuals be linked in a shared community.

In addition to mastering academic subject matter, students must know the correct manner of displaying knowledge by using appropriate speech and behavior on the right occasions and selecting the best reply (Mehan, 1982). They need to develop competence in all areas of communication, including effective listening and speaking, in order to enhance learning and understand the social rules involved in using language in a school context (Pinnell & Jaggar, 1991). These rules are specific to the classroom and school context and learned from interaction with others within the group, and students and teachers constantly construct specific contextual clues through learning activities during everyday classroom life (Green, 1983).

Understanding social organization and appropriate means of communication represents knowledge about classroom situations. In a writing classroom, shared communication should be a way to link students into a specific community as they begin to perceive themselves as practicing writers. As students become socialized into the culture of a specific classroom, they become members of a new cultural group. Based on teachers, parents, and other students as models, students construct ideas of how they fit into the classroom, what expectations are maintained, what classroom practices are acceptable, and how they can best communicate to the group (Bloome, 1991). They also become influenced in developing ideas regarding interpretation and use of language as it applies to classroom life and beyond (Bloome, 1991). A community of particular writers is thereby developed as students and their teacher construct cultural and social practices with written language as a group. Students' vocabulary usage indicates the ways in which they categorize their

learning experiences (Saville-Troike, 1982) and define knowledge. Academic content is thereby socially constructed as students create opportunities through interaction that shapes everyday classroom life (Tuyay et al., 1995).

The learning environment of a process-oriented class treats learning as nonlinear and accepts errors as part of the learning process (Applebee, 1991). Developing low-risk learning environments can assist students overcome "cognitive dissonance" that develops when new material challenges their basic beliefs (Barrett & Wootten, 1994). Realizing that students communicate in patterned, systematic ways can help teachers realize what students feel is meaningful and allow for negotiation in developing successful classroom life (Carbaugh, 1994).

At a community college, focus on the classroom environment is particularly important for students who have not experienced much academic success in the past. They have already become resistant toward learning, and tensions may exist due to differences between student and teacher perceptions.

Community college students who have been labeled as underprepared bring diverse interpretations of classroom life and various learning barriers. Their learning may be "blocked," particularly when interaction between student and teacher and definition of classroom behavior are not effectively negotiated (Wilson, 1997, p. 293).

Maintaining an open, positive classroom environment can reconcile tension and bring all members of a class together as a community. Teachers and students can examine everyday classroom events to develop an understanding of how social practice, cultural

meaning, and literacy shape content in order to provide insight into learning (Tuyay et al., 1995) and the relationship between teaching and learning (Green, 1983).

Summary

This section addresses the first two research questions, How do my perceptions as a writing instructor in a beginning community college composition course compare with my students' perceptions? and How do my students and I understand real and perceived consequences that arise from various views about writing? Students and teachers build knowledge and understanding about composition through experiences shared in the classroom setting. Before experiences can be shared, participants must be able to define terms used in the writing process and agree on types of communication that are acceptable to everyone in the classroom. In community college classrooms, particular understandings are constructed as students overcome learning barriers and perceive themselves as writers.

Teacher as Researcher

Using a teacher as researcher approach (also called action research), defined by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1990) as "systemic, intentional inquiry by teachers" (p. 2) to study and better understand educational concerns is strongly represented in recent literature. According to Braithwaite (1995), a rationale for teacher as researcher includes several areas. As the students' learning environment, classrooms are where educational questions and concerns are present. Teachers have extended contact with students and access to information which can be used to answer these questions. Teachers are also in a position to

observe students in several social and academic situations in the context of particular school and classroom cultures (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1994).

Investigating such educational questions can lead to personal teacher development, improved professional practice, a stronger educational institution, and a contribution to society (McNiff, Lomax, & Whitehead, 1996). Educators researching their own classrooms become more knowledgeable about how their students learn, understand how they can best help their students, and become more reflective on their behavior and attitudes (Atwell, 1993). As teachers go through the research process, they "synthesize and alter the conditions of the classroom," taking further responsibility for student learning (Patterson & Shannon, 1993, p. 10), build theory in authentic settings, gain respect, and expand learning opportunities for students (McFarland & Stansell, 1993).

A teacher researcher is an educator who takes on the role of generating knowledge by using daily access in classrooms to formally study educational issues related to classroom practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990). Educators involved in researching their own classes study their own experiences, address issues of importance to their classrooms, describe people in action, examine their own practices, and extend professionalism in teaching. Rather than being viewed as classroom managers, these teachers are uncomfortable with outsiders telling them how to conduct classes and assist students. Instead, teacher researchers maintain a philosophical point of view that values the uniqueness of students and classrooms (Patterson & Shannon, 1993) and believe in the

"power of their own research to help them better understand and ultimately to transform their teaching practices" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990, p. 8).

In addition, "Teacher researchers are uniquely positioned to provide a truly emic (or insider) perspective on teaching, a perspective that makes visible the ways students and teacher together construct knowledge" (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1994, p. 29). Teacher researchers discover, interpret, and explain events with the purpose of improving instruction (McNiff et al., 1996). The relationship of teacher researchers to their students is "long-term, intense, and direct professional involvement" and includes "systematic subjectivity" (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1994, p. 28).

As teachers actively participate in classroom research, they "better understand themselves as professionals, their students as learners, and the relationship between educational theory and practice. This knowledge and understanding leads to empowerment, which enables teaching professionals to be reflective, effective change agents for the betterment of all students" (Braithwaite, 1995, p. 122).

Using a teacher as researcher approach is especially important in a community college setting. Community colleges have been stereotyped as teaching institutions that leave research to the universities. However, with their emphasis on teaching and learning, community colleges are in an excellent position to develop research that focuses on learning and generate a knowledge base that incorporates issues of nontraditional students. Community colleges can also use research to improve their image, foster university understanding, and develop further public respect.

Any writing classroom involves an interrelationship among different aspects of writing, the way individuals view themselves, and class interaction among students and between students and the teacher. These relationships constantly shape and influence perceptions. Therefore, a teacher as researcher approach expects the teacher to be an active participant in the class and research in order to become immersed in the investigation and best understand realities of the participants as they occur. A holistic approach involving all members of the class who agree to the study provides richer description and more knowledge about participants and their perceptions. According to Atwell (1993),

> Educators who learn in their classrooms, who conduct research and write about their observations, become the best possible teachers, thoughtful about how students learn and how they can help. They understand that real learning is always active and collaborative, for children and for adults. And they find their voices. They reject the role of teachers as mere technicians, people easy to bypass or blame, and redefine professionalism. They turn teaching into work that is real. (p. vii)

Using a teacher as researcher approach therefore allows professional, in-depth reflection and study to produce "informed action" to assist teacher understanding of student learning (Patterson & Shannon, 1993, p. 9). In particular, "teacher research can add a new perspective about teaching and learning for college educators because it asks them to examine their own teaching and its implications for themselves as well as for the broader educational field" (Short, 1993, p. 156).

Another advantage of a teacher as researcher approach is that students usually become involved in the process as co-researchers. Participants are consulted to check if

their perceptions concur with the researcher's (Heron, 1981). Teachers may ask students to role play, reflect on their opinion and progress, and re-enact situations connected with the classroom environment and subject. Through such involvement, students have an opportunity to assess themselves and become more thoroughly engaged in the class as they examine their own learning community (Green & Bloome, 1997).

Since the researcher "must be in constant interaction with the setting and its inhabitants in order to understand them" (Lincoln, 1985, p. 141), using a teacher as researcher approach is valuable in unfolding the multiple realities present in a classroom environment. By remaining constantly in the environment to be studied, the researcher "not only is afforded continual opportunity to ask questions but also has the opportunity to learn what questions to ask" (Wolcott, 1988, p. 192). Since multiple value systems (including those of the researcher) are "worthy of description" and "form a dynamic element in the study itself . . . the value positions of different parties must be understood and honored if the study is to be authentic" (Guba, 1978, p. 16). Finally, this research approach assists teachers in understanding and interpreting how the participants in the social setting of a community college classroom environment "construct the world around them" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 6).

Summary

Student attitude and perception can be shaped by a number of situations and experiences. Negative attitudes regarding one's writing ability and interest can result in lack of confidence, superficial writing, and a weak command of the written language

(Sledd, 1993). Particular concerns of nontraditional students can have an impact on learning. The social organization and communication practices of the classroom also affect the interests, perceptions, and achievements of students. Researching the problems of differing perceptions about writing and perceived consequences of varied views through a teacher as researcher approach can provide valuable insights into genuine feelings of student writers and produce action into developing a more supportive classroom environment.

Reviewing these four areas of literature is important in providing background to helping answer the research questions. Examining writing apprehension provides insight into how student perception has developed and rationale into why some students fear or resent writing. Investigating classroom culture and communication details information about the development of relationships and understanding various views about learning. Using a teacher as researcher approach provides a way to conduct the study in a manner that will best make visible the perceptions of the participants in a community college setting.

The next chapter describes the design of a study that researched students' and their teacher's perceptions of writing in one beginning composition class at the community college level. Information about the setting, participants, protection of participants, data collection, procedures, and data analysis is included in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to investigate community college students' and their teacher's perceptions about writing in a beginning composition course. Questions guiding the study are as follows:

1. How do my perceptions as a writing instructor in a beginning community college composition course compare with my students' perceptions?

2. How do my students and I understand real and perceived consequences that arise from various views about writing?

3. How could my students and I mediate or resolve various views about writing?

The design described in this chapter is proposed to answer the three research questions. Chapter 1 presented an introduction and overview of the study, listed the research problem and questions, provided background and boundaries of the study, defined key terms, described the significance of the study, and presented limitations. Chapter 2 provided support for the research questions by indicating writing difficulties of students. It discussed the social organization and communication practices in the classroom, and it provided details about the teacher as researcher role. Chapter 3 presents the design of the study, including setting, participants, protection of participants, data collection, procedures, and data analysis.

A pilot study I completed in 1995 found that College Composition I students in a variety of majors generally felt positive about their experiences with the writing process by the end of the semester. Participants recorded more confidence in their writing abilities and more comfort with the use of various writing components as a composition course progressed. However, the pilot study consisted of survey research and focused on student assessment of the writing process instead of the entire classroom environment and did not include students who may have dropped the course before the end of the semester. By studying a particular group of students for an entire semester in the community college classroom environment, valuable information may be obtained about how teachers and students within such a setting perceive writing and if or how potential tensions about writing are resolved.

This study investigates the complexity of a community college beginning composition class to provide a holistic view of participants and their perceptions. Ethnographic methods are used to observe students and the teacher as they engage in composition education. Such inquiry assists me in developing a better understanding of the participants and improving practice.

Setting and Participants

Setting

A small, midwestern community college was targeted for the study. Originally this institution began as an area vocational/technical school and later received community college status.

This college has a split campus in two locations. During the study only one location was used, drawing from a rural/small town environment. Since this is the campus where I teach, using this familiar site helped me concentrate specifically on student involvement in one class because I was already acquainted with the background and inner workings of the college itself. This site allowed me to give attention to a real, immediate concern in a personalized context and allowed application to an ongoing course.

The campus is located on the outskirts of a small town and is surrounded by grass and farm land. The campus of this nonresidency college consists of six buildings: administrative; student union; business, agriculture, and general education classrooms; library; industrial technology classrooms; and agricultural technology classrooms. The college also owns a near-by farm that is used as a lab for students studying dairy herd management.

There are 8 counties served by the college. None of these counties contains an urban area. They all have per capita incomes below average. Four out of 8 counties served are among the 10 Iowa counties with the highest level of poverty.

Classrooms in the business, agriculture, and general education building where the study was conducted are arranged with long tables and chairs facing a teacher's desk or table. This traditional design can not be changed due to the space limitations and sharing of rooms by a variety of teachers. Each room contains a wall clock and usually an overhead projector. Three computer labs are situated in the building. Although they are

heavily scheduled with computer classes, there are a few free periods throughout the week for use by other classes and free slots available during computer class time.

The full-time instructors of the college composition class in this institution (with similar philosophies and feelings of commitment) attempt to create a community of writers, where students work collaboratively to assist each other in developing ideas and improving individual writings. Two textbooks, a reader and a handbook, are required for all sections of the course. Computer labs might be used during class if available. The course is conducted using a variety of activities within the process approach: lecture, whole class discussion, small group discussion, individual writing activities, role play, silent reading, student presentations, videos, and oral readings.

Student Participants

Students enrolled at this college include a wide range of ages from recent high school graduates to older adults returning to complete a course of study or learn a new skill. Average student age is 26 with 66% female and 34% male population, and programs such as Post-Secondary Enrollment Option are attracting a growing number of younger students. The student ethnic population data reflects the background of the general population in the district (White--96%, African/American--1%, Native/American--1%). Approximately 55% of the students taking courses for credit are full-time and 45% part-time. Both transfer and vocational/technical students are represented.

Most students work full- or part-time. Many are single parents, disadvantaged, or handicapped. Some women and men are entering occupations not traditional for their

sex. At least half are first generation college students, and more than half are both academically and economically disadvantaged.

The academically underprepared students attending this college are often encouraged to spend more time in developmental courses so they face fewer frustrations in beginning coursework. Significant economic and societal problems facing students include environmental concerns, substance abuse, AIDS, family and other violence, racism, teen pregnancy, loss of better paying jobs, and lack of access to health care (physical and mental).

The large percentage of our student population receiving financial aid indicates that many learners come from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Many students have children and jobs, and indicate they are preparing themselves for a more financially secure future. Special needs include childcare arrangements, commuting from various communities, and financial constraints. Graduates from community colleges tend to remain in Iowa longer than graduates from other higher education institutions, and our graduates often return for retraining and upgrading of skills.

Typically sections of the beginning college composition course contain students in technical programs who may not recognize that writing has value in their professional training, older students returning to college after many years' absence from an educational environment who fear they can not complete with younger students, students coming directly from high school who are unsure how to handle the rigors and responsibilities of college, and students confused about the writing process. Students

may feel excited about their opportunities to attend college and expand their writing skills, but might not feel confident about one or more areas of the writing process.

Participants included all the students in one section of College Composition I (the first-year writing course and prerequisite for other writing courses) who voluntarily agreed to become involved in the study. The first day of class, the course content was introduced. I told students about the study, the importance of learning about their perceptions, and the benefits of involvement. They were asked to join the study and complete a participant form. All students agreed to participate.

The maximum limit per section of College Composition I is 22 students. In this class, there were 19 students enrolled. The class contained a mixture of students who had experienced a process approach to writing as well as students who had primarily used a traditional approach, and included students of various ages and both genders, and variety of background experiences.

The participants involved in this study ranged from ages 17 to 24. Two students were high school students taking classes through the Post-Secondary Enrollment Option program, and one was from the Alternative High School. There were six students from the electrician program, three in the Associate of Arts program, two in business, two in health information, one in nursing, one in human services, and one undecided. Participants included 12 males and 7 females. Six students were unemployed while

attending classes during the semester of the study, and the other participants were employed full- or part-time at jobs paying near minimum wage.

Students asked very few questions when they agreed to participate in the study. Throughout the semester they occasionally asked about my study as related to my doctoral program. Mostly they accepted the study as a natural, unobtrusive part of the course. They never hesitated to speak when the tape recorder was running and disclosed sensitive information in journals, even though they realized the entries would be copied for the purposes of the study. Occasionally a student would ask me to keep information confidential.

During the same semester I taught two additional sections of the beginning composition course. Although these students were not direct participants in the study, I often used them as a check. I did not discover major differences in attitudes and writing ability among the three groups.

A table showing participant demographics follows (Table 1). Information regarding age, high school grade point average, major, employment, and interests identified the first day of class are included.

Table 1

Student Demographics

Name	Age	HS GPA	Major	Employment	Interests
Steve	20	1.3	Electrician	car wash manager	hunting, fishing
Gary	18	2.9	Electrician	self-employed	boating, baseball
Bill	18	2.5	Electrician	unemployed	engines
Don	18	3.2	Electrician	unemployed	outdoors, sports
Jake	18	2.5	Electrician	electrical company	outdoors, music
Ed	18	3.1	Electrician	unemployed	outdoors, 4-wheeling
Bob	18	1.6	Associate in Arts	farm work	weight lifting, music
Nathan	17	3.0	high school	unknown	outdoors
Brad	17	---	high school	computer set-up	music
Doug	17	---	alternative high school	restaurant	reading, music, skateboards
Andrew	20	3.2	Associate in Arts	unknown	fishing, hunting, music
Stan	21	---	Associate in Arts --	restaurant	painting, music
Laurie	18	3.6	A.A.--pre-business	telemarketing	shopping, music, skiing
Diane	19	3.1	Health Information	unemployed	dancing, piano, music
Joy	18	2.6	Health Information	self-employed	babysitting, swimming
Mary	24	---	Nursing	unemployed	horses, reading
Jane	18	3.1	Business	restaurant	swimming, traveling
Cindy	18	2.8	Undecided	unemployed	poetry, body piercings
Bridget	18	1.5	Human Services	bartender	stock cars, pool, horses

Instructor Participant

When I began teaching 22 years ago, I believed that a teacher was primarily a disciplinarian who needed to get students through a certain amount of curriculum. During my first, one-year assignment as a 10th-grade English teacher, I was given a textbook that contained vocabulary lists and essays with study questions following. I became particularly interested in writing and student perceptions during the second semester when I stopped using the textbook because the students seemed bored. After developing a portfolio system and letting students choose from a variety of writing assignments, I watched student interest blossom.

During my second teaching assignment, I taught English as a second language to refugee adults and teens. My interest in student perceptions expanded as I worked with adults who were illiterate in their first language, teens who needed to quickly expand their knowledge of English to succeed in academic classes at the local high school, and adults who needed working knowledge and usage of the English language to prepare them for employment and higher education.

My past experiences led me to the community college where the variety of students facing difficulty in writing and low self-confidence has further developed my interest in the ways students view themselves in the classroom environment and their abilities as writers. Now this interest is connected with the current study.

As the teacher/researcher I served the dual role of participant and observer. As a participant I worked directly with students by learning, writing, discussing, and relating

with them. As an observer I carefully considered the nuances of the classroom environment and individuals and made notes on my observations, interviewed students, and wrote personal notes about my impressions in my journal.

I see my role in the classroom as the instructional leader. I lead discussion, prepare curriculum, give assignments, assess papers, give advice, and answer questions. I give students opportunities to practice and enhance their writing in a low-risk environment and show them techniques that might prove helpful.

Protection of Participants

Since I was the researcher as well as the instructor of the course in the classroom studied, the rights of the participants were thoroughly considered. One concern of participants was that participation in the study would be connected to grades. It was emphasized that participation was voluntary, and results of the study would not be evaluated until grades had been averaged and distributed. Grades from the class were not contingent on participation in the study. In addition, students' comments in journal entries were given completion points, not graded as to content. The course requirement regarding journals only included the number and length of entries. Informed consent was obtained from each participant the first week of the course. College administrators were also consulted about the study, and permission to proceed with the study was granted from the department chair and vice-president.

In order to maintain confidentiality of participants and protect their identity, pseudonyms are given for students' names, and the location of the study is not named.

Also, any personal information that does not apply to the writing process, classroom relationships, or college environment is not disclosed in the study. At all times participants maintained the right to request that certain information not be included in the study. Access to field notes is available only to me. After the study has been approved, all field notes will be destroyed.

An advantage of using the teacher as researcher was that following extensive contact, students became more comfortable and felt more trust with me than an outside researcher because of the natural setting and traditional concept of teacher as educational leader (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1994). As the students learned more about me as an individual, became comfortable with my teaching style, participated in low-risk classroom activities, and interacted with me in the hallways as well as the classroom, they began to develop a positive relationship with me and trust in me as the teacher and researcher.

Also, when data collection is routinely conducted in the class, "the methods of the study will not intrude on the rhythm of the class" (Myers, 1985, p. 9). Since the research involved the day-to-day activities of the class and because I was an active participant of the class, students should not have possessed a feeling of intrusion or fear of an outsider judging them.

A disadvantage of teacher as researcher may be an initial lack of ease by students who fear that not participating in the study may affect their grades. However, students soon became used to the research as part of the everyday class proceedings. In addition, the many in-class, ungraded assignments allowed students to become less concerned about grades and concentrate more on the learning process. Self-assessment activities were also valuable because students had opportunities to describe their own strengths and weaknesses.

Procedures

Phases of the Research

A four-phase plan was used to review and analyze two types of relationships: observing relationships among students, checking these interpretations, observing student/teacher relationships, and again checking interpretations. For the purpose of discussion, these four phases were separated. Initially, the phases were built in the order provided. However, during the study phases took place simultaneously since the process was recursive. Tables 2 to 5 indicate how each phase connects with the research questions.

Table 2

Relationships Among Students

Phase 1 Observe Relationships Among Students	1. How do my perceptions as a writing instructor in a beginning community college composition class compare with my students' perceptions?
Observations/Field Notes	X
Instructor/Researcher Journal	X
Course Materials	X
Student Interviews	X
Student Records	X
Individual Student Journals	X
Written Assignments	X
Member Checks	X

Phase 1. The first phase, observing relationships among students, was used to view and record the types of activities relating to the students' social circles, how students related to written assignments, and the types of collaboration that resulted. My primary focus was to answer the first research question. Audio taping was completed daily to ensure exact recording of data. Although collaborative groups were sometimes assigned, students also had the opportunity to self-select groups and position

themselves at will at the beginning of each class period. It was expected that various relationships would develop among students, students would express their attitudes about writing and classroom life in general, and students would group themselves based on common interests inside and outside the college environment.

Data collection for this phase included the following:

1. Observations/field notes: Field notes included information about how students related to each other and the class environment in general.

2. Instructor/research journal: Data in my journal included my analysis and feelings about what I had seen and heard.

3. Student interviews: Interviews included student/teacher conferences held during four essay assignments spread throughout the semester.

4. Individual student journals: Journal prompts (questions that I generated for journal writing) included questions about working with peers.

5. Written assignments: Written assignments included a collaborative assignment where students wrote an essay as a group and short, ungraded, in-class writings.

Table 3

Interpretation Check of Relationships Among Students

Phase 2 Interpretation Check	1. How do my perceptions as a writing instructor in a beginning community college composition class compare with my students' perceptions?	2. How do my students and I understand real and perceived consequences that arise from various views about writing?
Observations/Field Notes		
Instructor/Researcher Journal		
Course Materials		
Student Interviews	X	X
Student Records		
Individual Student Journals		
Written Assignments		
Member Checks	X	X

Phase 2. The second phase involved checking my interpretations and focused on the first two research questions. According to Heron (1981), fully understanding human behavior "involves participating in it through overt dialogue and communication with those who are engaging in it" (p. 23). Therefore, built-in checks included talking with students about my perceptions and asking them to role play situations connected to

classroom life. Other writing teachers and program instructors within the college were asked to review my interpretations and comment on audio tapes of classroom activities. Discussions with colleagues allowed me to compare my perceptions about participants with teachers who had knowledge of the same students as well as teachers who understood the writing process but were not acquainted with the participants.

Data collection for this phase will include the following:

1. Student interviews: During role play simulations, students were asked to demonstrate situations that may occur in a writing classroom. During conferences I questioned students about my observations. Selected audio tape recordings were replayed for students to check my interpretations about these segments.

2. Member checks: Colleagues were asked to make clinical observations and record their perceptions. Before each observation I told colleagues what I hoped to accomplish during the class period, described what they should look for, and discussed their criteria for judging perceptions. I asked colleagues to take notes during observations, and I took notes during our discussions following observations.

Table 4

Observing Relations Between the Students and the Teacher

Phase 3 Observe Student/ Teacher Relationships	1. How do my perceptions as a writing instructor in a beginning community college composition class compare with my students' perceptions?	2. How do my students and I understand real and perceived consequences that arise from various views about writing?	3. How could my students and I mediate or resolve various views about writing?
Observations/Field Notes	X	X	X
Instructor/ Researcher Journal	X	X	X
Course Materials			
Student Interviews	X	X	X
Student Records			
Individual Student Journals	X	X	X
Written Assignments	X	X	X
Member Checks			

Phase 3. The third phase involved observing student/teacher relationships, including any tensions that developed and concentrating on all three research questions.

Students' body language, written and oral comments, and degree of involvement in classroom activities were analyzed to discover apprehension toward the course, the instructor, and writing itself. Changes in student/teacher relationships and positive and negative results of writing assignments were also recorded.

Data collection for this phase included the following:

1. Observations/field notes: Reviewing the audio tape at the end of each day allowed me to hear any nuances that might indicate tensions between a student and myself. Close observations during the class period allowed me to watch the students and their involvement.

2. Instructor/researcher journal: My journal was used as a vehicle in which to record my perceptions about the students and analyze any problems that might occur.

3. Student interviews: Direct questions about the class were asked during conferences to solicit information about the students' perceptions regarding instruction.

4. Individual student journals: Prompts were given to gather written information about each student's involvement in the class and perceptions that may have differed from my own.

5. Written assignments: Assignments were read not only for content, but also to assess any misunderstanding of directions that could relate to apprehension.

Table 5

Interpretation Check of Student/Teacher Relationships

Phase 4 Interpretation Check	1. How do my perceptions as a writing instructor in a beginning community college composition class compare with my students' perceptions?	2. How do my students and I understand real and perceived consequences that arise from various views about writing?	3. How could my students and I mediate or resolve various views about writing?
Observations/Field Notes			
Instructor/ Researcher Journal			
Course Materials			
Student Interviews	X	X	X
Student Records			
Individual Student Journals			
Written Assignments			
Member Checks	X	X	X

Phase 4. Phase 4 again checked my interpretations through input from other teachers and students in the class while attempting to answer all three research questions. Instructors who taught related courses to the participants were asked to share copies of

written assignments to analyze if writing instruction and attitude about writing transfer from the writing classroom to other classes.

Data collection for this phase included the following:

1. Student interviews: During role play simulations, students were asked to demonstrate situations that may occur in a writing classroom. During conferences I questioned students directly about any tensions I perceived in the student/teacher relationship.

2. Member checks: Colleagues were asked to make observations while I was teaching and record their perceptions. Before each observation I asked colleagues to look at the ways the students and I related with each other. Following observations my colleagues and I discussed any perceived tensions. Selected audio tape recordings were played to provide information for additional analysis by colleagues.

These four phases were constantly repeated as classroom activities changed. Behaviors before and after each activity were noted, and any changes were recorded and analyzed. Throughout the entire research process, I continued researching and reading professional literature that related to teacher as researcher approach, ethnographic research, classroom community, and instruction in writing to continue the triangulation process and collect as much relevant information as possible.

Data Collection

Since the focus of the study is to examine perceptions of participants in the course, I used ethnographic methods to allow for thorough description and interpretation

about composition at one community college. Ethnography is defined by Wolcott (1988) as "a picture of the 'way of life' of some identifiable group or people" (p. 188) and its significance is "derived socially . . . from discerning how ordinary people in particular settings make sense of the experience of their everyday lives" (p. 191). "The purpose of educational ethnography is to provide rich, descriptive data about contexts, activities, and beliefs of participants in educational settings" (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984, p. 17).

Ethnographic methods include recording events as they occur in real settings, using a variety of research techniques to acquire data, triangulating data among sources, using rich description of phenomena, taking information in context, and analyzing data throughout the study. Sources of information for this study included observations/field notes as well as an instructor/researcher journal, course materials, student interviews, student records, individual student journals, and written assignments as described below. Samples of participants' writing were evaluated by recording and comparing changes in effort, attitude, creativity, and skill.

Ethnographic methods are suited for research in and about education because they focus on the perspectives of people who are doing the teaching and learning. In addition, ethnography is suited for composition classrooms where students' experiences are treated as a "lived, complex, and ongoing process" (Lu & Horner, 1998, p. 262). As a process of inquiry, ethnographic research can explore the cultural practices and life within a classroom community to understand a certain group of people in one setting by using a

focused approach. This type of research is used to "understand what counts as education to members of the group and to describe how this cultural practice is constructed within and across the events and patterns of activity that constitute everyday life" (Green & Bloome, 1997, p. 184). Using such methods in my study allowed me to collect details, provide a credible description of the complexities of everyday classroom life, make connections between classroom research and educational theory, show other teachers of writing what to expect, and strengthen my commitment to high-quality teaching.

To adopt an ethnographic stance means to become enmeshed in the everyday life of a classroom. I therefore needed to identify a variety of aspects: activities that reoccured, student ways of participating, teacher talk and direction, and classroom relationships. Using such methodology allowed attention "to the cultural context of the behavior" being observed and the "mutually understood sets of expectations and explanations" that allow interpretation of occurrences and meanings "probably being attributed by others present" (Wolcott, 1988, p. 193).

Observations/Field Notes

To closely examine details of the class, observations included information about class participation, body language, discussion, and activities. Some observations were hand recorded during the class period; for example, when students were completing in-class writings or working in groups. Due to time constraints, the necessity for teacher/student dialogue during class time, and importance of maintaining a normal classroom environment, observations were usually recorded at the end of each school day.

In order to maintain a check on my memory and verify sequences of events, an audio tape was made during each day's class. I expanded upon my field notes as I listened to the audio tapes at the end of the day.

Instructor/Researcher Journal

Since this study examines how teacher and student perceptions about the writing classroom are viewed and how perceptions may contrast, I wrote a daily journal to record my reflections and perceptions. Journal entries recorded my feelings, description of student behavior, and rationale for class activities. Details of the teaching/learning process could therefore be recorded as they occurred in order to provide richer description and lead toward improving practice.

Course Materials

Course materials contained information given inside the class. General information such as the college-maintained course guide and individual course syllabus were used as part of the data collection. Other course materials included handouts, assignment sheets, journal prompts, overhead transparencies, and college-distributed course evaluations. A student information sheet was given the first day of class to obtain a general student profile and ask students to self-disclose comfort levels in various aspects of the process approach.

In addition, focus groups were assigned for students participating in the study. Focus groups differed from peer editing groups because students were asked to talk about the class and their impressions without the teacher as part of the group. An audio tape

was used to record their comments. In order to solicit student response, I rephrased my three research questions and asked students to discuss their views about writing and being a student in the class, the problems that could arise when people within the class have different views about writing, and how they suggest resolving any conflicts in the class.

Student Interviews

Part of the process approach to writing entails instructor feedback. Individual student/teacher conferences were used in the College Composition I classroom with each of four major essay assignments. Each conference for all students agreeing to participate in the study were audio taped and later transcribed. During the conference, students were also interviewed about their perceived progress in the course. Informed interviewing, defined by Wolcott (1988) as "interviewing that does not make use of a fixed sequence of predetermined questions" was used to elicit information from participants who were reluctant to disclose feelings in a more structured setting

(p. 196).

Role playing was used to give students an opportunity to become physically involved in portraying their feelings. This strategy was also used as a check to ensure that my perceptions were accurate.

Student Records

Student records, materials accessed outside the class, included high school and postsecondary transcripts. They provided information about the number of classes involving literacy completed by participants as well as grades received in all classes.

Records also included current course enrollment and declared major. This information indicated past performance in writing classes of some participants and provided demographic information.

Individual Student Journals

Student writing journals provided a low-risk format for students to express feelings about the writing classroom and their progress within the classroom and the general college environment. Prompts were used to elicit specific information about perceived writing strengths and weaknesses, concerns about certain elements of the course, obstacles encountered, and likes and dislikes about elements of the process approach including conferences, revision, and peer editing.

Students were asked to describe their peer-editing experiences, discuss their writing habits, consider why some learning experiences were successful or unsuccessful, and describe the standards of quality set for individual writing. The journal format was helpful in tracing the thinking of students as they used the process approach, examined awareness of themselves as writers and class participants, monitored their own learning, and progressed through the course.

Written Assignments

Five graded, written assignments (including four individual essays and a collaborative project) were evaluated to determine student progress in writing. A formal evaluation sheet was used to examine rhetorical elements of each writing, and coding was used to indicate areas of strength, weakness, and change. Short, in-class writings were

assigned in class to assist students with problem writing areas. Other written assignments were used to determine student changes in effort, interest, and perception. Although these in-class assignments were not graded, they allowed students to practice writing strategies and use self-assessment techniques.

Cataloguing Data

For purposes of cataloguing and organizing data, Agar's (1986) model of classification was used. There are three categories to this model: levels of talk/topics, degree of control, and recording strategy.

There are several aspects to cataloguing data: (a) students' use of classroom resources, (b) how students understand classroom resources and requirements, (c) what happens during writing events, and (d) how students understand what happens during writing events. These aspects are important to consider because they focus on who introduces topics, the amount of student involvement, whose perceptions are involved, and details of incidents. In addition, cataloguing data provided a further check on my perceptions and involvement in the process.

The first category of Agar's model of classification, levels of talk/topics, contains three levels. Level 1, observing daily class life, focuses on gathering representative samples of classroom life. Level 2, interviewing students about class life, and level 3, student reflections about data collection, promote understanding of how participants characterize class events. The second category, degree of control, describes how I

account for topics of talk chosen by the teacher or the students. The third category, recording strategy, records how the data were collected.

Information was recorded on a chart form and dated. Reference was made to the original documentation source.

Data Analysis

"In attempting to set down in writing what you understand, you become most acutely aware of what you do not understand and can recognize 'gaps' in the data while time remains to make further inquiry" (Wolcott, 1988, p. 200). Therefore, data were analyzed as collected so preliminary analysis could guide further data collection and help me question my original assumptions. According to Guba (1978), reality "exists only in the minds of individual people and depends heavily on their separate perceptions." This reality "is constantly changing in terms of time, people, episodes, settings, and circumstances" and "has many layers" (p. 15). In addition, ethnographic-type data "is derived socially, not statistically, from discerning how ordinary people in particular settings make sense of the experience of their everyday lives" (Wolcott, 1988, p. 191).

The constant comparison method was used to find categories. As social incidents were recorded, simultaneous comparisons were made of all data collection areas to discover relationships. As I read through journals, transcripts, field notes, and written

assignments, I looked for key words and ideas of significance to the questions of the study. Areas were coded and continually compared.

Initial categories that related to the research questions included student/teacher classroom behavior, student/student relationships, background in writing, identified learning, student/student conflict, student/teacher conflict, types of questions asked, student talk, teacher talk, and attitude toward education, the classroom, and writing. Categories continued to be refined and analyzed. Each new event was compared with past events to see if new relationships developed.

Other categories were not named in advance because it was expected that various categories would emerge as observations continued and students disclosed their perceptions. Information was therefore sorted into general categories according to themes that emerged throughout the research process. Themes were selected as patterns or regularities within the data were discovered. Categories included types of information that were reported frequently, issues that were important to the purpose of the study, and insights by participants and researcher. Sorting occurred continuously during the research segment of the study. Following the end of a semester, data were refined and regrouped into final descriptive categories.

Information from each data collection area was analyzed for emerging themes and the ways these themes linked among topics. Data collection was drawn and analyzed from the following areas:

1. Observations/field notes: Patterns of communication were especially important to note. Areas included teacher versus student topics, formulation of student questions, discussion responses, periods of silence, teacher presentation of assignments, lecture format and student response, and side comments among students. Themes also developed as I observed how students elaborated on their comments, formulated ideas, and accepted or rejected new writing techniques and ideas. In addition to analyzing people-related data, I looked at the events surrounding communication and the processes in which students were involved.

2. Instructor/researcher journal: As I reviewed my recorded feelings and personal reactions to classroom events, themes regarding teaching and learning developed. Emerging categories included areas of insight and frustration. I looked at the kinds of knowledge transferred among students and between students and myself, the influence class members had on each other, and the types of exchanges made.

3. Course materials: Materials were analyzed as to how they enhanced or detracted student understanding of course content, writing, and the classroom environment.

4. Student interviews: Interviews provided information that overlapped with observations. After coding interviews, data was matched with information from other sources to see if contradictions existed. Additionally, interviews were used to evaluate the accuracy of my findings.

5. Student records: Records were used to determine demographic information about students. Background information was compared to ascertain if age, geographical origin, or past grades influenced current success.

6. Individual student journals: Journals were coded as to reoccurring themes about perceptions on a wide range of classroom and writing activities as well as past experiences and attitudes about writing.

7. Written assignments: Evaluation forms were completed for each graded assignments. Students were required to make two copies of each submitted assignment; one to be turned back to students after grading, and one to be kept as part of the study's artifacts. These assignments were coded as to content, use of audience awareness and purpose, variety and clarity, organization, and types of grammatical and mechanical errors made. Copies of ungraded assignments were also made and evaluated as to the effort put into each writing and student understanding of the assignment.

Trustworthiness

In order to ensure trustworthiness, detailed background information and description is used to let the reader make decisions regarding application of data to other classroom environments. Techniques for ensuring credibility included cross-examination (further questioning to determine structural integrity), persistent observation ("observation made through an extended period of time" [Wolcott, 1988, p. 192]), credibility checks with peers and participants (asking colleagues to interpret data and

categories and check perceptions), and prolonged engagement (analyzing a complete semester).

Additionally, triangulation, defined by Wolcott (1988) as "obtaining information in many ways rather than relying solely on one" (p. 192) was used to cross check "data and interpretations through the use of multiple data sources and/or data collection techniques" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 109). Using journals, field notes, interviews, and written assignments provides a variety of data for credible evidence.

Categories

Categories were generated by the following method. First I read through the data, looking for important themes and recurring information across sources (see Figure A3). As categories were observed, I began to develop a list during the coding process (see Figure A4). This list continued to grow during coding.

Information from the data was rearranged and placed under the corresponding category (see Figure A5). Coding was added to identify the data source. For example, J1 was used for journal 1 or the first series of journal entries required from the students. Original data source material was stored in folders that were marked with the category symbols.

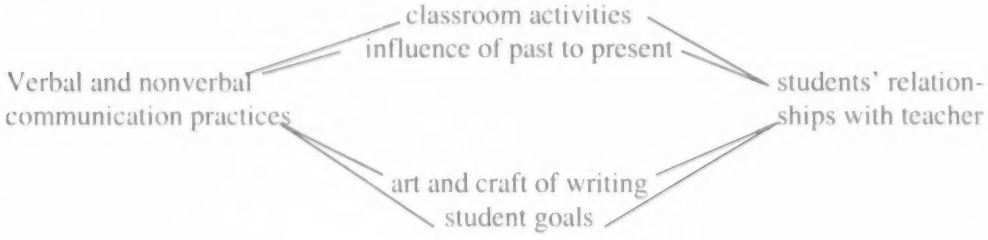
Categories were then expanded, and an outline form was used to connect categories to appropriate research questions. This outline was expanded and organized into student versus teacher perceptions (see Figure A6).

Using the same categories, connections were drawn among categories to view relationships. The number of connections among categories within the same research question was listed after each category (see Figure A7).

Categories were then reorganized into related areas based on main themes and connecting subthemes (see Figure A8). The themes were used to complete Chapter 4. A chart (Figure 1) showing the final category connections in each research question follows.

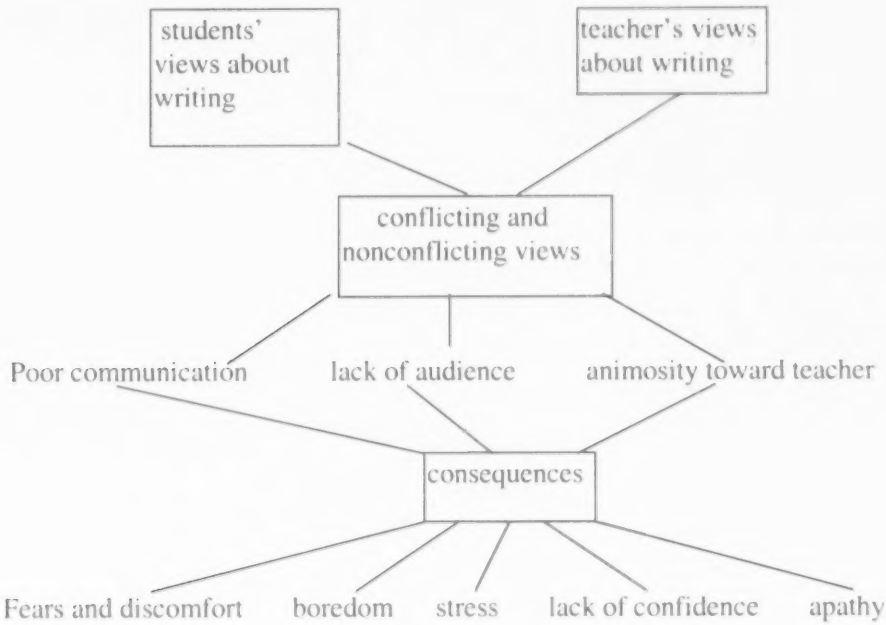
Figure 1. Final category connection.

I. How do my perceptions as a writing instructor in a beginning community college composition course compare with my students' perceptions?

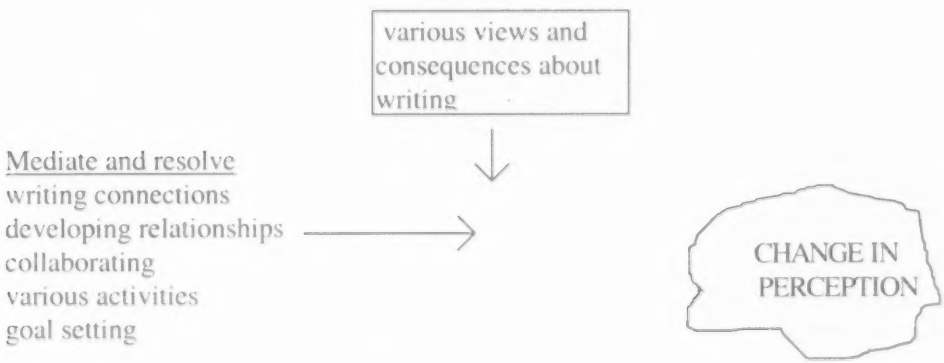


(figure continues)

II. How do my students and I understand real and perceived consequences that arise from various views about writing?



III. How could my students and I mediate or resolve various views about writing?



Conclusion

This chapter explained the design of the study. Information was provided about the setting and participants, procedures, data collection, and data analysis.

The following chapters present actual data and findings from the study. Chapter 4 includes the results and analyses of the study. Chapter 5 provides a general discussion of the main findings of study and includes implications for further research and instruction regarding writing and student/teacher perceptions at the community college level.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Chapter 4 presents results and analysis of the study. The six sections in this chapter address answers to the three research questions and provide other information relevant to the study.

In order to best understand background about myself as teacher and researcher, the first section in this chapter presents views that I hold about writing. My past experiences and philosophy of writing and teaching are discussed. A sample class day is described to provide understanding of the way class was conducted, basic requirements, students' initial behavior, and my feelings at that moment. General semester activities are explained, and a brief timeline is given.

Second, information triangulated from the data is used to answer the first research question, How do my perceptions as a writing instructor in a beginning community college course compare with my students' perceptions? This section addresses views dealing with education, the class, peers, and writing ability.

The third section of Chapter 4 answers the second research question, How do my students and I understand real and perceived consequences that arise from various views about writing? This section addresses problems arising in a writing class culture including behavior in the classroom, student/student relationships and conflicts, and student/teacher relationships and conflicts.

The fourth section of Chapter 4 answers the third research question, How could my students and I mediate or resolve various views about writing? This section discusses changes that occur in student attitude, self-image, and perceptions of the classroom and writing in addition to teacher assessment of techniques and attitudes that enhance learning.

A character sketch and class incident are added after discussion of each research question to illustrate particular occurrences and how they relate to the data. These more personal incidents provide a deeper view into classroom life and the people involved in the study.

The fifth section discusses main themes of the analysis. Three particular ideas are strongly threaded throughout the data connected with all research questions. The main themes include how students' past views of themselves influence their present attitudes and behaviors, the importance of collaboration, and the necessity of developing goals.

The sixth section deals with contradictory data. Not all outcomes were positive, and several students withdrew from the course. Conclusions about student attrition are discussed in this section.

Instructor Views About Writing

My Background and Philosophy

This section explains how my view of writing has developed and the experiences that influenced me. My philosophy is important in understanding why I use a particular teaching approach.

My view of writing is based on my educational training, teaching experience, employment as a journalist, personal and professional reading, and writing experience. As a high school student in the late 1960s, I was asked to complete grammar worksheets and diagram sentences in writing courses. In literature courses I was asked to put writing into a more realistic form by completing essays and research papers analyzing readings. During my undergraduate training at a church-affiliated private college, I completed writing and literature courses for an English major that again emphasized essay writing and grammar. I remember taking a course entitled Classroom Discipline where the professor said it was not important for secondary students to like us as their teachers. It was instead necessary that we kept control of the classroom environment to ensure the students remained busy at all times.

After I began teaching in my own classroom as a certified teacher and worked closely with students on a daily basis, I quickly realized that writing was primarily an intellectual activity. Without thinking deeply about the topic first, most of my students had difficulty developing ideas of substance and did not seem to take much ownership in

their assignments. These students only completed writings because they were assigned, and the resultant scores would be averaged for a grade.

My experience teaching English as a second language to adult and teen refugees proved to me the importance of literacy in our society. The refugees who did not possess appropriate literacy skills could not function effectively in American society. Several of my students developed mental and physical health problems, misunderstood native speakers and writers, and needed assistance for any type of legal concerns. I realized that writing is a survival tool necessary for communication in a technology based country.

As a journalist I was involved in writing for weekly publication. All my comments had to be accurate since people throughout the state would be reading the newspaper and relying on me for information. Inaccuracies would affect not only the credibility of the newspaper and people I interviewed, but also my reputation.

As a prolific reader of novels I prefer stories where characters are developed to the point they become like real people to me. I find myself involved in their lives, and I care about their problems and how they are resolved. I enjoy rich description and details that place me into the setting and feelings that produce an emotional response from me.

As a writer I want others to share my experiences and feelings. I want to communicate with people I know well and with individuals I have never met. I complete several drafts of each manuscript because I want to present the clearest viewpoint possible. Usually I plan an idea in my mind or talk with people about the topic before

writing so the flow of words is easier during the writing stage. I understand the joys of seeing my work on a published page and the sadness of miscommunication.

As a teacher in a community college beginning composition course, I realize that my students need to prepare for academic and employment related writing and to compose for personal purposes. Although my students are not preparing to become novelists or write on a freelance basis, they will need effective skills to write business letters, proposals, recommendations, and business and clinical reports. They need to do more than get a passing grade in their composition course.

I believe that writing is foremost an intellectual activity that involves time to think through ideas, perceptions, and problems. Consideration of purpose and audience is necessary in developing a document that will be seriously considered by the reader. A rough draft is used to initially get a writer's words, ideas, and feelings on paper. Following drafts are developed during the revision stage as a writer refines ideas, develops firm focus, considers word choice for clarity, and proofreads for mechanical and grammatical correctness. Peers can be invaluable during the revision stage to critique a manuscript before it is viewed by the public.

Based on my views about writing and goals I have set for my students' progress, I conduct the beginning composition course at my community college in a particular way. As the student make-up changes, employment demands vary, and technology advances, my teaching methods and assignments change. However, my basic philosophy and approach to teaching writing has remained constant during the several years I have taught

at the community college level. Use of the process approach has been valuable in generating more student enthusiasm for writing and assisting students in more quickly strengthening their writing skills.

The first week of the beginning composition course, I present my general philosophy about writing and explain the writing process to students. The main reasons for this approach are to help students become more comfortable with aspects of the process we will use in the classroom, promote positive attitudes toward writing and the class, provide understanding of writing terms that will be used throughout the semester, and give time for students to think about their past and present beliefs about writing. At our community college I am aware of tensions that exist within some students who dread enrolling in a writing course. Therefore, I prefer to have students think, talk, and read about writing rather than actually write during that first week. As they acquire an understanding of the course and instructor expectations and hopefully develop some expectations of their own, they can better ease into writing.

A major problem indicated by past students has been the difficulty of coming up with a writing topic. To combat that difficulty, I illustrate several creating techniques which may be helpful in eliciting ideas during the first week. Students practice a clustering activity where they graphically portray words associated with an original idea; looping, which involves timed freewriting based on a focus questions; a topic tree which graphically allows students to develop a focus; and reporters' questions, developing

thought provoking questions starting with the words who, what, where, when, why, and how.

I discuss and show examples of purpose and audience to demonstrate how writing style might differ depending on these elements. In addition to textbook essays, I present three of my short, published articles written for educational journals and a local newspaper. All articles were based on a trip overseas, yet each one is written in a different way and contains varied information. Students have the opportunity to see that I am a practicing writer, not only a teacher of writing.

Class discussion is used to enhance textbook information and teacher presentation about writing. The text is used so students can easily review information and examine writing samples at home as they prepare for their writing assignments. My presentation provides the same type of information in a different, more personal form. Students with different learning styles should be able to comprehend the material more fully since it is presented in oral forms.

I also place students in small groups for short projects so they become comfortable with each other. I assign groups and change members with each assignment during the first few weeks so I move students away from previous acquaintances and enable them to introduce themselves to other classmates. My main goal in small groups is to promote a community of learners who support and appreciate each other.

Sample Class Day

This section describes one day in the college composition course to provide insight into the way my views thread into class meetings. Data sources include transcription of the class, instructor/researcher journal, a student information sheet, and other course materials. The first day of class is used in this illustration since it sets up the main requirements for the class and provides a glance at my impressions of the students before I became acquainted with them.

As I walked into the classroom, 19 new faces turned toward me. A few faces appeared anxious as they quickly glanced to the side to avoid my gaze. Some faces were hidden behind baseball caps and difficult to see, while other students answered my smile of welcome with upturned lips and bright eyes. One young male with unkempt, blonde hair slouched in his chair with his arms firmly crossed, a woman with pierced ears and nostrils opened her notebook, and a lightly bearded man shuffled nervously in his chair. Typically, the last row was completely filled with young males. Other students were scattered in the first three rows of long tables and stuffed, swivel chairs rescued from a computer lab renovation.

I placed my books on the teacher's desk, which was littered with scraps of paper, assorted pens and pencils, and food crumbs of the previous teacher. This was my last class of the day--2:30 p.m. This was the first day of the fall semester, and I was exhausted. I had earlier introduced the beginning college composition class to two other sections and met students in two sections of another course. I had mailed information to

independent study students, helped several lost souls understand their schedules, and answered questions about required textbooks, course requirements, and the upcoming schedule. At least I had time earlier to quickly eat my sack lunch consisting of a turkey sandwich and thermos of milk. I had heard other teachers complain they had no time at all for lunch.

In addition, I had spent many hours preparing for the course. My handouts were in order, I had reviewed the textbook, and my beginning comments were ready to give.

I was sure the students were worn out too. Course loads of this group consisted of between 12-18 credit hours. Like me, the six electrician students started their school day at 8 a.m. and moved from class to class throughout the day. A couple of students drove 80 miles a day to pursue an education, while several of the teenaged males lived in an apartment away from home for the first time. Two post-secondary enrollment option students drove from their high school to college three afternoons a week in order to receive high school and college credit for two courses. An alternative high school student sat next to a nursing student. Two health information students and several Associate in Arts students rounded the group.

I took roll and introduced myself. Since I strive to develop a community of learners who help and support each other in each class, I believe it's important to personalize the activities as much as possible. Therefore, my lengthy introduction included my interests, hobbies, and family as well as my work and educational history. I asked each student to follow my lead by introducing him/herself. After each student

finished speaking, I asked a follow-up question to show interest and shook the student's hand to make a personal connection. The first day of class had officially begun.

Although I have taught this course for several years, it is never exactly the same. I vary activities and assignments, change texts, and design new curriculum. However, the most significant variation among sections deals with the student make-up and how the students drive the culture of the class. Oral introductions and student information sheets help give me an immediate perspective about the class.

The students in this section were a particularly young group. The median age of our general student population is 27, and I often teach students in their 30s and 40s. This section's median age was 18, and only three students were in their 20s. In most instances, older students are more mature, possess higher motivation to succeed, and are better able to utilize life experiences to assist them in coursework than students of traditional college age who attend our community college. It appeared as if this group might be a tough crowd to please.

After introductions that first day of class, I carefully described my expectations, the importance of the course, the upcoming assignments, the required textbook, and the extensive daily syllabus. As a student myself, I like to know what will be expected of me at the beginning of the semester so I can plan for the upcoming months. I feel that a major part of being a successful student is effective organization. Therefore, I am well organized as a teacher in order to satisfy my own needs and help students learn better organizational skills.

One of my main expectations is that students attend class each day. This may seem like a simple requirement. However, at our community college as well as others in our state, poor attendance is an issue. This first day of class I tried to emphasize the importance of being an engaged participant of our group.

Another part of my syllabus is a section on what constitutes plagiarism. Unfortunately each year there is at least one student who brings to class an assignment that is obviously not a student's own work. For example, one student submitted an essay to a teacher that was written by a student taking the class the previous semester. We wondered if the student thought the teacher's memory was poor! On another occasion the student forgot to change the header on her friend's essay she submitted as her own.

I told the class about a past incident of my own. One of my students brought me a paper that was beautiful in every way. It had in-text documentation, elegant style, and correct grammar throughout. The paper was about abortion, and the student (who had never shown me any prewriting) had said he was writing about cars. After questioning, he admitted that his sister "helped" him. In other words, his sister had written the paper for another class and let her brother have a copy.

I hoped that having high expectations of my students would show them that I believed them to be intelligent, important people who can complete tasks to the best of their ability. I emphasized that I was willing to assist students outside class if they were unclear about any part of the process. Therefore, there would be no need to plagiarize.

I gave students a list of the point system and assignments. Again, I feel that presenting such information up front should help students organize throughout the semester.

The journal assignment was explained. Students would be responsible for two journal entries per week. A few prompts were listed on the syllabus, some would be provided in class, and students would have opportunities to select prompts of individual interest. I gave students a list of possible journal entries because in the past students have complained that they could think of nothing of importance to write.

I also described the purpose of keeping a journal and how a writer's journal differs from a diary. When I first required journals several years ago, students often wrote about the weather, their boyfriend or girlfriend troubles, or aspects about daily life. I soon realized that I had not given enough instruction on how to keep a professional journal so I developed a handout discussing the purpose and ideas for entries.

I reminded students that although I would read each journal, it should be written to help the individual. I explained that professionals in many fields use journals. I hoped that making connections between the classroom project and professional interests would further engage student interest.

Next I began a discussion intended to lead students back into memory to view attitudes about writing and how they might have changed. I asked students to remember themselves when they were children and first learned to write. If they could not remember that early age, then I asked them to think of a child well known to them such as

one of their own children, a brother or sister, or a niece or nephew. Thinking about a real person was intended to give students someone tangible to relate to instead of a fictitious individual.

I asked students to tell me how they first formed letters. After no responses, I picked up a pencil, and held it the "proper" way. "Did you hold your pencil like this?" I asked. Heads shook from side to side and a few snickers were given. As I placed my pencil between my fingers, one student held his pencil in the middle of his fist in opposite demonstration.

Then I asked students if they ever wrote on a wall or piece of furniture. Several heads shook up and down this time. "Why did you do so?" I questioned. "Were you naughty?"

"No!" a voice finally answered. "I just wanted to show the world I could write! Plus I didn't know any better!"

"And what was the first word you wrote?" I prodded.

The same young man replied, "My name. I was so proud to write it."

I told the class the story of my young son who used to scribble on a piece of paper, wad it up, put it in the mailbox, and say, "Mommy, there's a letter for you!" Then I'd have to ask him what the letter said since I couldn't read it.

I asked the class how my son could dare call his scribbles writing. "It was writing to him! Plus he probably saw you writing and copied you," was the answer.

Looking at the past helped us begin an interesting discussion of how we first learned how to write, who taught us, and how we felt about writing at the beginning. All students but one were positive about their initial writing experiences. The young man who felt negative when young was left handed but was forced to write right handed--a negative attitude that has carried with him ever since. Other students related bringing home little stories to their mothers and being praised, incorporating pictures with words, and hanging their work on walls at school and refrigerators at home.

Just as nostalgia set in, I tried to bring in the class connection. "How do you feel about writing now?"

Words such as difficult, boring, and not fun drifted throughout the classroom. As students grew older they had to incorporate spelling and mechanics into their writings. They moved away from creating their own stories to reporting on more academic topics that were assigned by a teacher. They discovered that writing took more time because they had to revise. Then grades were added to stories that were originally completed just for fun.

The question that I did not expect students to answer aloud, but to consider their individual response, was to evaluate what makes writing easy or difficult. I hoped that looking at their backgrounds would help them realize their present attitudes, and students with negative attitudes might rethink their initial response to the class.

When the end of the class session neared, I reminded students about their reading assignment for next time. Then I stood at the desk, smiled, and waited in case anyone

had a question. No one spoke with me, but I did hear one electrician student complain to his friend that this was his only class of the day that had not let out early.

Semester Activities

Several activities occurred throughout the semester and were recorded in the instructor/researcher journal, course materials, and observations/field notes. The first week was used to introduce students to the course, me as the teacher, the textbooks, and the process approach to writing that would be used. In-class writing activities, discussion, and a video demonstrating the peer editing process consumed the second week of class. I wanted students to have the opportunity to practice and discuss writing in order to become more comfortable in the class environment before beginning their first major assignment. This time also gave me a chance to learn more about my students' backgrounds and their present attitudes and perceptions.

I also began to introduce activities that would be used throughout the semester. Although varying activities was important in maintaining student interest, it was also necessary to set some patterns of activities to help students feel comfortable.

One type of activity continued throughout the semester was the use of grammatical mini-lessons interspersed with other activities. I have developed a series of overheads covering these lessons. The required handbook contains similar information, but I have tried to condense it and present the information with examples that can be studied by the entire group. The lessons are meant to enhance the text information which I expect students will locate on their own as needed.

My first mini-lesson dealt with commas. Punctuation is not the most important aspect of writing, but many students in the past have questioned me about commas and expressed confusion when trying to use them. Punctuation rules are fairly straight forward and can easily be discussed. I developed a list of eight general rules of comma usage and listed an example of each one. Using an overhead let students see the list at one time and allowed me to easily point from one example to the next. I also explained each rule and the rationale for using it. I told students that after we went over each mini-lesson, I wanted them to connect each one to their own writing.

Unlike the problematic aspects of emphasizing grammar typical of the traditional approach to teaching writing, mini-lessons were short and not isolated from student writing. The mechanical elements discussed in mini-lessons were tied to students' essays, either in peer editing groups or in individual conferences.

For example, during a conference I questioned a student, "On your last paper you misused commas in the same way. Do you remember our discussion about commas? What is the reason for adding a comma here?" Such dialogue helped students develop language about writing and understand the nuances related to their individual writing.

A related activity involved students working with punctuation on their own. I gave each student a one-page article I had typed without punctuation. I read the article, trying to properly enunciate so students could hear which type of punctuation was needed. Then I gave students the original copy of the article and had them "correct" their copies. The following discussion revolved around the importance of punctuation and the

differences between the students' and original copies. I like this activity because it is physical as well as mental and incorporates careful listening and concentration skills.

Mini-lessons contained more than practice with mechanics. I also wanted to illustrate many aspects of writing including clarity, audience awareness, and word choice. These lessons were usually connected to difficulties students were facing in their essays. I used a particular exercise to help students realize how vague words can cause readers to become lost and bored. I briefly discussed the words connotation and denotation and provided examples of each. To illustrate my point, I gave a physical demonstration. On a sheet of paper I had written several synonyms of the word walk: hike, promenade, saunter, stomp, etc. I asked a student to read one word at a time. When he read the word, I walked in a similar manner. I knew the students got the point of the message when the word tramp was read. They began to laugh as they thought of the various connotations of the word--something I had not considered before!

One "danger" of grammatical exercises is students might think that grammar and mechanics are the most important aspect of writing. Worrying about the placement of a comma while writing the first draft can stop a flow of ideas. I hoped I had previously made students well aware of the main emphasis on writing for meaning. I told students to focus on grammatical elements during the revision stage. Using short mini-lessons gave students information on one area at a time instead of trying to study all aspects at once.

Another common class activity was the use of invention techniques. After I demonstrated several techniques, I provided class time to complete techniques. I timed

students during freewriting, I put them in groups for peer brainstorming sessions, and we created as a group while I wrote ideas on the blackboard. In addition to modeling a pattern important to generating ideas, students had a chance to create together instead of waiting until they were alone at home.

A third common activity involved essays from our textbook. Each chapter contained five professional essays. I asked students to read a common, assigned essay for a short quiz. Students could select a second essay from the reader. I divided students into interest groups so three or four students would read the same selection. This was also a way to encourage different people to work together. After discussing the selection in small groups, students in each group went in front of the class to discuss their reading selection. The only requirement was that each student had to make at least one comment.

Although a few students appeared shy about presenting their views orally, most of them expressed themselves well and allowed time for each group member to speak. They took leadership in discussing the essay they had read, and other students listened to their expertise in analyzing a short piece of literature.

As the semester progressed, activities were repeated. More mini-lessons were introduced, each essay assignment was given in the same manner, and conferences and peer editing became a normal part of our classroom life. A brief listing of classroom activities is presented in Figure 2, the following timeline.

Figure 2. Timeline.

Week 1:	Introduction of class Self-introduction to students Student introductions Syllabus discussion Plagiarism discussion Journal explanation Elementary writing years discussion Student information sheets Letter to assigned classmate Overhead presentation on definition of writer Writing process discussion
Week 2:	Letter to Polish students Newspaper assignment Video on peer editing Introduction of first major assignment Textbook essays discussion Looping and other creating techniques practice Short reader essay quiz
Week 3:	Punctuation exercises
Week 4:	Conferences for first drafts; peer editing
Week 5:	First essay due Journals submitted Plagiarism discovered Second essay assigned Reader essay quiz
Week 6:	Grammatical mini-lessons; student attrition begins
Week 7:	Peer editing; differences noted between first and second times Conferences
Week 8:	Second essay due; third essay introduced
Week 9:	Further attrition

(figure continues)

Week 10: Fourth essay introduced

Week 11/12: Usual activities

Week 13: First collaborative project

Week 14: Second collaborative project

Week 15: Annotated summary

Week 16: Showcasing; class ends

Students' and Teacher's Perceptions

Throughout the semester students disclosed in writing and orally their feelings and views about various aspects relating to their education, class, peers, and writing abilities. This section describes data collected from a variety of sources that answers the first research question, How do my perceptions as a writing instructor in a beginning community college composition course compare with my students' perceptions? A character sketch and class incident are provided as personal examples addressing the first research question.

Body Language

One of the most obvious indicators of interest or discomfort in the classroom was the body language of the students. Several references to body language were recorded in field notes. Some of the younger males in the study hid behind the bills of their baseball hats, while other students' puzzled looks and searches through notebooks indicated confusion. It was easy to locate unprepared students by the way they glanced around the room to avoid eye contact. Watching students closely assisted me in analyzing the ways

students perceived each day's events. Close observation assisted me in discovering students' attitudes (both positive and negative) about classroom events--boredom when mini-lessons became too lengthy, lack of engagement when they began looking around the room instead of involving themselves in writing activities, increased animation when working in small groups, and raising hands during class discussion.

The type of body language that had the most impact was smiling. When I gave in-class writing activities I usually completed my own writing at the same time. I glanced at the students on occasion in case there were questions. Often I would note a student pondering an answer who made eye contact at that moment. Whenever I smiled at the student, I always received a very warm smile in return. Standing by the door with a smile near the beginning of class, saying good-bye with a smile at the end of the session, and greeting students in the halls always had the same response--a friendly return. Although I noticed that not all students greeted each other the same way, the rapport between the students and me increased rapidly when they saw I felt positively toward them.

Five other main categories were discovered upon analyzing the data related to the first research question: classroom activities, the influence of past attitudes and behaviors to the present educational setting, the art and craft of writing, relationship with the teacher, and goals. Each of these categories are discussed from the teacher and student perspective.

Classroom Activities

Six main classroom activities are described in this section: attendance, working collaboratively with peers and the teacher, question/answer techniques, differing teaching and learning approaches, testing as a transferable skill, and expectations of the class and teacher. Data sources for this section include instructor/researcher journal, observations/field notes, written assignments, student interviews, student records, individual student journals, and member checks. Although perceptions of these areas became more positive as the semester progressed, each activity produced some conflict at the beginning of the semester due to varied perceptions.

A basic difference in perception between the students and me dealt with attendance. In general, poor attendance is an issue at our community college as well as others in our state. Students have families, jobs, and other commitments. Also, the poor study skills and minimal work habits of some students produce a lax attitude toward attendance. The class represented in the study was no exception to this general college problem.

The definition of good attendance differed between some of the students and me. As a student myself, I believe in near-perfect attendance. I want to best utilize my time and opportunity to learn as much as possible. I feel that part of the learning process includes developing knowledge about factors that influence student success. My syllabus stated that poor attendance may affect students' grades, and I told students I would expect

the same attendance as an employer since part of their training in my class was to prepare for employment.

Although I did not mention this to students, I do not feel it is fair when students who constantly miss class blame me as the teacher for their not understanding material or expect me to repeat information to them individually. Time is precious for students and teachers alike. While I am willing to help students facing difficulty, I do not like to have my time wasted. In the past, students have missed class due to vacations, alcohol abuse, apathy, transportation problems, and personal concerns.

Although many students in the study were responsible students, others displayed poor attendance practices. One young man often came to class late. He sometimes fell asleep at home and did not wake up on time or was playing a video game and lost track of time. His physical appearance of unkempt hair and dirty shirt led me to believe he was not feeling very positive about himself in general. Composition class certainly was not a priority.

The class met from 2:30 p.m. to 3:25 p.m. on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, which was the last class of the day for most of the students. That time period was difficult because students were tired after a long day of studying, two students had children awaiting them at home, and others traveled several hours to their parents' homes on the weekends. Other reasons for missing class included medical appointments, field trips, and illness.

Students who missed class were usually lost when they returned. They had not read the daily schedule so were not prepared for the day's lesson, had missed earlier class announcements, were unable to develop satisfying peer relationships, and had missed instruction which would have helped them apply important aspects to their writing assignments. Rather than realizing the importance of attendance and trying to engage themselves in the class to catch up, these individuals distanced themselves further. They obviously did not see themselves as master students.

Past grade point averages and journal writings indicated that these students had set a pattern of poor attendance in high school. They treated their college classes like independent study courses, believing they had paid for the class so they could finish the minimum assignments, submit them for a passing grade, and receive credit for the course. Poor attendance connected with statements in journal entries indicated these students were not concerned with learning material or enhancing their writing skills.

A second classroom activity that was initially viewed differently between students and me was collaboration. From past experience as a student and teacher, I have discovered that working with my peers and instructor side by side enables learning to take place more quickly. One person's idea feeds off another, direct instruction takes place in the exact moment of need, and classroom participants learn to trust and appreciate each other.

While most students in the study eventually appreciated collaboration, they were initially hesitant. One reason pertained to experiences in high school which promoted

competition rather than collaboration. As indicated in early journal entries, many students viewed writing as a solitary activity and did not realize that involving others in the process could produce a better product. They also did not understand that working collaboratively with peers could produce learning of new topics, ideas for better organization, and enhanced problem solving skills.

In addition, several students did not look at the student/teacher relationship as involving collaboration. The teacher was seen as the person with the power of making assignments and assessing student work, not as a coach to direct students' progress through a piece of writing. Many students were uncomfortable sitting next to me during conferences and tried to move the chair I had placed beside me across the table. They asked few questions not related to understanding assignments.

A third classroom activity interesting to explore was the use of question/answer techniques. I believe that question/answer techniques can be used successfully to help students think more critically. Probing questions help students look more deeply into a topic and lead them to new directions. Near the beginning of the semester, students in the study were hesitant to answer questions aloud. Body language of wiggling in seats and avoiding eye contact initially indicated discomfort. Sometimes no one would respond orally to a question without my prodding. In journals several students discussed that they did not like to speak aloud in the class, citing "shyness" as a reason.

A fourth area that produced varied perceptions was differing teaching and learning approaches. I realize that each teacher possesses her own style and has developed

teaching methods that work best with her philosophy. I also understand that individuals have different learning styles, and when placing students in groups they will approach assignments differently depending on the make-up of the peers.

However, how students approach assignments can be an area of dissension if they feel disconnected from the assignment or the teacher's approach or if they are close minded to new ideas or trying new activities. Some students in the study preferred a hands-on approach, while others wanted me to lecture information while they listened. Most students appreciated the personal aspect of working in small groups, while one student said he learned nothing from his peers. Although most students wrote in journals that they appreciated my discussion about the writing process the first week of the semester, one student called the discussion boring. Other students preferred writing poetry or fiction and were not as interested in writing the essays required in this class.

A fifth classroom activity involved testing. Although I seldom use tests in writing classes, I give four short essay tests throughout the semester based on text reading. I believe that testing is a transferable skill. Many of our students possess weak test-taking skills due to test anxiety, poor study habits, or little experience in test-taking. The program instructors at our college have told me their students generally do poorly on essay tests. Therefore, I try to teach students how to effectively take essay tests by practicing in the composition class. I also announce that students can question me during the test if they do not understand a question so I can further instruct them.

A common reaction to testing was, "I've never done well on tests." Some students believed that since they were not successful with test-taking in the past, they would never improve in this area and did not expect themselves to achieve high scores on tests. Other students did not read the required material before the test in our class. Reasons included they forgot, they did not review the daily schedule to learn about the assignment, and they did not view a test of only ten points worth preparation time.

A sixth area generated from the data was expectations of the class and teacher. As the teacher I expect all students to think well of each other and offer their support as they learn together. I know that every student can accomplish success in my class if he or she is willing to make the time and effort to attend class, complete assignments as suggested, fully participate in classroom activities, and revise documents until they have reached professional quality. In order to reach the necessary level of competence, some students may need to meet with me for individual instruction or request assistance at our college learning center.

I try to involve students with each other in small groups so they become acquainted. In the past I have found that the high expectations of peers often produce more positive attitudes. Therefore, promoting student relationships can allow for additional support.

A few of the students in the study did not respond to high expectations. They indicated they did not care what others thought about them or their ideas. Peer and instructor praise and encouragement produced no visible change in attitude or

performance. A related concern was these students having few expectations of themselves as learners and not expecting the composition course to be valuable to them individually.

Influence of Past Attitudes and Behaviors

Past attitudes and behaviors, both positive and negative, were found to influence attitudes toward the present educational setting. Students addressed the connection between their attitudes toward education and past experiences in high school. Areas in this section include family influences, study skills, homework, hands-on versus intellectual activities, and high school experiences. Data sources include observations/field notes, instructor/researcher journal, student interviews, student records, individual student journals, and written assignments.

Having been raised in a supportive family environment in which education was valued, I have experienced first hand how families can influence children's aspirations in a positive manner. I also understand the influence of the elementary and secondary educational environments as well as peer persuasion and realize that people's home environment and economic status vary greatly. Although I try to provide a safe, comfortable classroom environment for my students, they might not be engaged in the learning process without receiving encouragement at home.

Several students in the study discussed using their parents and grandparents as positive models of literacy. Parents also taught high moral standards, respect, and a strong work ethic by modeling behavior they expected of their children. Parents of these

students praised them often for work well done and for avoiding negative peer pressure. They spent much time with their children, promoted questioning and discussion, and engaged in open, positive communication.

In other families parents did not appear to take as much interest in their children, which hampered effective communication. One parent was described as being controlling. The parents of two students had divorced, with only the custodial parent maintaining a relationship with the children.

Views of the students in the study on a variety of topics obviously mirrored those of their parents, again indicating family influence. Several students' essays quoted parents and connected students' and parents' beliefs.

Each student who discussed positive parental relationships and high family expectations maintained high grades, good attendance, and positive peer and teacher relationships in the composition course. Students who were less successful did not necessarily speak in a negative manner about their parents, but were more likely not to mention parental involvement at all. While the Hawthorne Effect could be one explanation for the apparent connection between success in the class and high family expectations, my perception is that students who had positive role models at home maintained more interest for schooling.

A second influence on success was related to study skills and developed habits. I realize that one's habits as a student are built over many years. Depending on family expectations, individual goals, and experiences, students possess different ways of

approaching their educational responsibilities. I believe that poor study habits of college students may be improved only if students have internalized the need for education and are committed to enhancing skills.

In my opinion, positive habits of composition students include excellent attendance, extensive revision when necessary, effective organization, questioning for clarification, and collaborating with peers and instructor. Students in the study who found writing difficult said that in the past they would quickly write a first draft without much thought about the topic, read the paper without considering possible grammatical errors or clarification needs, type the assignment, and consider it finished. Several students said they "never opened a book" in high school and were only interested in "getting by." Students who had been out of high school a few years described their study skills as "rusty."

A few students who received average grades in high school were ready to change their habits in college. Many of the class participants had been taught under the traditional approach to writing in high school and were not familiar with the collaborative aspects of the process approach. Students who recognized that their writing could be enhanced by utilizing the process approach used suggestions in revision and preparation and actively assessed their skills and sought improvement. Other students, however, continued the same practices as in high school, feeling their study habits were "good enough." They did not seem to connect the idea of effective study habits and success.

Related to study skills was attitude toward homework. A few students seemed to feel that all work should be completed during class time and resented homework. One woman told me she only completed her homework one day a week. If an assignment was due before that day, she did not feel it was her fault the work had not been completed. Other students waited until the last moment to complete assignments, which did not leave much time for revision. One student stated she hated writing because it was a form of homework.

These students viewed homework almost as forced labor. Rebelliousness developed when students felt forced into work beyond their wishes. They did not view writing assignments as satisfying documents in which they could explore topics of interest or vehicles in which to enhance their skills.

Several of the male students in the class were enrolled in the electrical program. A majority of these students viewed a conflict between hands-on versus intellectual activities. They told me in the past they had only done well in shop classes, felt uncomfortable in literacy activities which did not involve much physical movement, and did not feel writing skills would benefit them as electricians. Such attitudes were typical of males in other technical programs in past semesters.

I realize that a person does not have to choose between a hands-on or intellectual approach; in reality they are related. I tried to help students make connections between the problem solving required as electricians and similar skills needed to produce a satisfying document. The most interesting break-through resulted from a discussion

about stereotypes promoted in the media about technicians being stupid, dirty, and unattractive and how general education courses can help releas tudents from that mold. By the end of the semester, there was still one electrician student who did not understand why he was forced to take a course that did not relate to his major.

High school experiences also influenced the present attitudes of the students in the study. Students who were in several extra-curricular activities such as newspaper, music, athletics, and other organizations had spent more time at school with their teachers and were more apt to maintain positive attitudes toward education. They felt more comfortable in the classroom and wrote with pride about their involvement in school-related activities.

On the other hand, some students related negative experiences that took place during high school. These students were particularly wary about the student/teacher relationship and did not appear to trust me at the beginning of the semester.

High school preparation for college varied among students. Three students were still enrolled in high school. Although their essays contained writing that was fairly correct grammatically, their topic selections did not have the maturity of other students. A few students felt that writing one type of document during high school was adequate preparation for the working world. Two students from small graduating classes had received much individual attention and felt well prepared to tackle new challenges.

The Art and Craft of Writing

Various perceptions existed regarding several aspects of composition as recorded in observations/field notes, instructor/researcher journal, student interviews, written assignments, and individual student journals. The following areas are discussed in this section: topic selection, overemphasis of grammar, benefits of the process approach, finding voice, journal versus diary, creativity, and students viewing themselves as writers.

Instead of assigning topics, I expect students to select topics meaningful to them as individuals. I believe that students have a wealth of topics from which to choose. Their experiences, relationships, opinions, and backgrounds can be used to generate a multitude of topics of interest to any reader.

Students, on the other hand, often did not believe their experiences were important enough to use as writing topics. A very common response was, "Nothing much has happened to me." They often had difficulty thinking of a topic or expanding on an idea. Sometimes they asked, "What do you want me to write?" indicating they did not feel confident in their own writing abilities. Stress developed when a student felt unsure of his or her choice of topic.

Overemphasis on grammar was another difficulty related to writing. Students discussed writing classes in the past that constantly used grammatical worksheets which were isolated from real writing. In addition, these students had not completed long essays or reports. They described the lack of enthusiasm by peers as well as the high school teacher. Students who were used to the grammatical approach initially seemed confused

when they were given more responsibility for expanding their ideas instead of concentrating first on grammar.

I observed that the body language of students showed boredom when too much lecture time was given to grammatical issues. Students began looking out the window or doodling in notebooks. They were more engaged when given a journal prompt or asked to complete group writing activities.

Attitude toward the process approach was another area of differing opinion. Although I believe there are many benefits to the process approach to writing, my students did not always agree with me at first. They perceived that using the steps in the process would be time consuming. Several students mentioned they wanted to write their assignments to "get them out of the way," caring little for purpose or audience. However, comparing drafts of students who utilized the process showed a major influence in writing improvement.

The importance of finding voice was another issue that produced differing perceptions. In the beginning composition class research-based papers were not assigned since I wanted students to develop a sense of individual voice. I believe that once students feel confident in expressing their own opinions, they can more easily learn how to incorporate the findings of experts. Also, strengthening grammatical and mechanical areas seems more relevant when students are revising essays that have personal meaning to them.

Some students in the study felt that other people had already written ideas that could not be improved upon and viewed writing as restating other people's words. Since they felt they had nothing important to impart to an audience and lacked confidence in expressing themselves in any form, voice was not an important aspect of writing in their eyes.

The students and I initially had different definitions of a writer's journal. In my view, a writer's journal is used to explore ideas, reference progress, discuss difficulties with writing, write questions to oneself, record interesting ideas from reading, explore the self as a learner, and reflect on one's skills. People in many professions use a journal or log format to record different types of information. Technicians keep track of problems of equipment, business people note information about customers, medical staff record patients' conditions, and farmers keep records of livestock. I believe that a writer's journal can be used to introduce students to professional recording strategies as well as help them reflect on concerns relating to the composition course and education in general.

Several students did not view a journal as worth their time as indicated by short, shallow entries. Others recorded information about the weather, problems with a boyfriend or girlfriend, or everyday activities. Most students seemed to appreciate prompts I gave in class, which gave them direction and hopefully new ways of looking at themselves as learners. A few students did not engage themselves in journals outside class, however.

The use of creativity marked another perception that varied between some students and me. I believe that creativity is an important aspect of writing. I often show students points of creativity that exist in otherwise poorly written assignments so they can use those points as a basis for building their documents during revision.

Some students seemed to feel that a strength of creativity meant technical aspects were unimportant; that if writers are creative enough, misspellings and grammatical errors do not need to be corrected. One student wrote a very confusing essay which his peer members did not understand. Even after I reiterated peers' concerns, pointed out several unclear areas and grammatical errors, and gave suggestions for revision, the final draft underwent little change. The student still felt he had produced an excellent piece of writing and stated he was "above" the other students.

The last area to address in this section regards how students viewed themselves as writers. During the first week of class, I encouraged students to think about themselves as practicing writers. I believe as writers they should realize their strengths and weaknesses, be able to discuss writing, understand the closeness of reading and writing, and collaborate with others. I do not believe a person needs to have written a best-selling novel to be considered a writer.

Students in the class did not always see themselves as writers. They told me they could not write and stated that writing was not valuable to them. "I do not have any strengths as a writer," was a common response in a journal entry. One student felt that he could not be considered a writer because he could not find his grammatical errors. Since

he felt he could not help himself, he also felt inadequate in assisting his peers. Without the ability to visualize themselves as writers, these students could not develop the intrinsic motivation to further develop their writing.

Relationship With the Teacher

The way I viewed myself as teacher and the way students perceived me did not always match. Also, the student/teacher relationship for which I strove did not always develop as I wished. This section addresses four areas: teacher preparation, organization, teacher as the sole audience, and praise in writing. Data sources include observations/field notes, instructor/researcher journal, student interviews, individual student journals, and written assignments.

The first area of discussion, teacher preparation, may have been the most difficult for students to understand since they did not realize the initial and continual training of teachers. They probably had never given much thought about teacher preparation, just expecting, "That's your job."

However, there is much preparation time involved in becoming a teacher, maintaining licensure, and setting up each class. I take graduate courses, attend workshops, and read professional journals to continue my learning about education. Before each semester, I photocopy handouts, revise materials, and read over class lists to learn the names of the incoming students. Record keeping as well as lesson planning are involved in every teacher's life.

A second issue, organization, dealt with both teachers and students. It is important for me as the teacher to be well organized so students can plan in advance and make connections between current and forthcoming assignments and lessons. The semester goes more smoothly when I have thoroughly planned activities, even though I maintain flexibility to change the structure when needed.

I believe that effective teacher organization can help model this skill for students. I worked individually with one student who was quite disorganized at the beginning of the semester. Although he had a copy of our daily schedule, he could not find it in his pile of papers. It was difficult to keep his assignment completion dates from all classes straight. I gave him the student handbook which included a daily planner and showed him how to record information. The following week he brought a leather organizer to class. His improved organizational skills foreshadowed his changing perception of himself as a successful student, and soon even his appearance began to change as he became better organized and saw himself in a new light.

The third area involved students perceiving the teacher as the sole audience. Many students had become used to writing for the teacher as the person responsible for grading assignments. Students often asked, "What do you want?" rather than considering their own interests and needs. Instead of envisioning a wider audience range, some students used "you" as point of view, directing comments to me. During class discussion or when giving short presentations, these students looked directly at me instead of including peers in their eye contact.

I wanted students to consider a broader range of audience. Certainly the teacher and classmates would read students' assignments, but other audience members might have included family, community members, legislators, or a specific age group. Near the beginning of the semester, it was difficult to help some students realize audience possibilities and actively think about these types of people when writing.

A fourth concern involved teacher praise in writing. Although I prefer waiting for the final draft to extensively praise the work of students who have fully developed a piece of writing, I believe it is important to identify students' strengths as well as weaknesses during conferences of first drafts. Students can therefore build on areas that work well.

However, too many positive teacher comments in the past led students in the study to believe they already possessed strong writing skills and did not need to revise. One student told me that her high school teacher said she was a good writer, so the student did not feel she needed improvement. Another student bragged that she was a prolific writer and wrote more than her high school classmates. Her papers were filled with misspellings and mechanical errors which she spent no time revising because she felt the length of her assignments was most important.

Student Goals

Student goals for college and the composition class varied and sometimes clashed with the goals I had set for the class and individual students. Evidence regarding goals came from observations/field notes, instructor/researcher journal, student interviews, individual student journals, and written assignments.

Students had many different reasons for attending college. Several students wanted to improve themselves and prepare for meaningful employment with acceptable wages. One student felt pressure from society to attend college so she would not be looked upon as being lazy. Another student hoped college would help him discover a direction in life and further develop his social skills. A single mother needed a better job to provide for her child and wanted to model the importance of receiving higher education. One young man was a first-generation college student, feeling proud that he was striving to "get somewhere" in his life. An immature student said he mostly enjoyed the parties associated with college life and was attending mostly to get away from his parents' control.

Reasons for attending college affected attitude regarding education and the composition course. Concerns in this section include receiving credit for the course versus learning goals, relationship between writing and profession, definition of proficiency, doing a minimum to get by, and self-expectations.

The first concern was course credit versus learning goals. As with all our courses on campus, the beginning composition course has a course guide that includes goals and objectives for any student who enrolls in the course. I gave a copy of this document to all students so they understood expected outcomes. I also mentally set individual goals that I hoped each student would achieve. I analyzed each student's entering writing skills and decided the exit skills needed for transfer, for enrollment in upper-level courses, and to function acceptably in the professional world.

In general, students in the study who attended college under pressure from society or family or who were solely focused on finding a well-paying job after graduation, were more likely to have set one personal goal for the composition course: receiving a passing grade in order to meet graduation requirements. A student who did not attend class for three weeks implied that he should receive a passing grade because he had paid for the course. Other students asked questions such as, "How many points is this worth?" rather than looking at the learning value of an assignment.

Students were up front about their attitudes toward required courses outside their major. "Honestly, if this class wasn't required I don't feel I would take it." Other comments included that English classes were a waste of time, composition was better than having to take a speech class and talking in front of people, and the writing process was pointless.

A second concern was the relationship between writing and intended profession. Many of the program instructors at our college have spoken with me about the importance of writing in their professional areas. Employers' biggest complaint is that their employees do not know how to write well, yet they are expected to communicate effectively in all ways to customers. Therefore, I am well aware of the need for my students to enhance their writing skills.

Unfortunately, not all students agreed with me. Particularly students in the electrical program felt they would never have to write once they finished college. Other comments included not understanding why the composition class was required, writing

does not apply to the "real world," and current reading and writing skills were "good enough" for the intended profession. Near the beginning of the semester when I tried engaging students in a discussion regarding examples of writing in their professions, no answers were volunteered. Part of the reason was lack of knowledge of the profession, but negative attitudes were also involved.

A third concern related to the definition of proficiency. From my own experience as a writer and teacher, I know that proficiency comes from practice. The more writing is practiced, the better the writer becomes. When we write we learn about ourselves. We further develop style and audience awareness as well as improving mechanical elements and word choice.

Some of the students defined proficiency as having written one document. "I already wrote an essay once in high school." However, the quality of the students' writing proved otherwise.

A fourth concern dealt with doing the minimum to get by. When I produce a document, I try to complete it to the best of my ability because my name is connected with each document. I realize that some documents may take much time and effort before they are ready to send to an audience.

Poor attendance was one indicator of students feeling the minimum was sufficient for them. One student called himself lazy, while another stated she wrote mostly for herself without the intention of sharing. One young man said if a document sounded good to him, he considered it finished. A young woman used the word "stupid" to

describe peer editing questions I expected students to answer, and wrote only a few words in response to analyzing her peers' essays. Based on these students' high school grade point averages, I believed that completing the minimum requirement had become a habit.

Related to completing the minimum was differing definitions regarding plagiarism. In addition to lifting another person's assignment, I define plagiarism as quoting material without citation, receiving so much extra help that a document is no longer one's own, and submitting past writings without approval. The consequence of plagiarism in our composition courses can be immediate failure of the class.

I realize that many incidents of plagiarism are not intentional. Since one purpose of the beginning composition course is to help students develop their own voices, research-based writing is not expected.

One of the students in the study tried to reuse an essay he had written for another class. He later admitted he knew his behavior was wrong, but he was trying to save time. He argued that he was already a good writer so did not need to attend class regularly or spend much time on his assignments. A classmate joined the argument and said that using one's own paper in any form was not plagiarism in his definition.

All the above areas were related to individuals' expectations of themselves as students. Individuals whose families expected polite behavior, high moral standards, and strong effort in school had set those expectations for themselves. Other students possessed poor study habits and called themselves lazy. One male stated he really did not feel like doing work yet. Based on low success rates in the past, lack of parental

involvement, drug and alcohol abuse, low confidence, or apathy, these students did not expect to succeed. The extrinsic motivation peers and I tried to provide was not enough drive to overcome the feeling of poor self-worth.

Character Sketch

As the semester progressed, I discovered students with common concerns. The following character sketch was created to show how one type of student viewed the college composition course and illustrate the differing perspectives between the student and me. Information for this sketch was gathered through observations/field notes, instructor/researcher journal, individual student journal, student interviews, student records, and written assignments.

The first day of class, I noticed Ed sitting in the back row in the far corner trying to further hide beneath his baseball cap. An 18-year-old student in the electrician program, Ed was not excited about the composition requirement for his degree. His journal expressed that "writing takes too much time," "I would never complete a writing if it weren't required in a class," and "I would rather be working on something than wasting time writing nonsense." In a more extensive journal entry Ed wrote,

> One question that always sticks in my mind is why do we have to take this class. You would think that after 13 years of school we would be able to write sufficiently enough to maintain a job. After already having one composition class in high school I am now taking basically the same thing again. I thought college was to train you for a career but I don't see how writing a composition has anything to do with being an electrician.

Initially during class discussion, Ed would remain silent unless asked a direct question. His preparation for class was minimal, and he was hesitant to fully engage

himself in a peer editing group. He said he "hated" his high school English teacher and obviously was not comfortable being in close proximity to me. The first day of class when I walked around the room to shake hands with each student in order to personalize the student/teacher relationship, Ed tried to avoid touching me by saying his hands might be dirty. I replied by assuring him I could easily wash.

Ed's writing skills did not match his description of competence. His assignments were written at the last moment, he was careless, he did not read the first required essay before the short test, and his journal entries were spotty. As the semester progressed, I learned about Ed's bad experiences in high school, the ways he felt betrayed, and the negative feelings some of the teachers had about him. Being in a classroom setting was not desirable to him.

Various aspects of Ed's behavior and attitudes reflect data represented in this section. Each area will be discussed below.

Body language. Ed's body language (baseball cap, hidden eyes, and positioning in classroom) showed his discomfort being in a composition class. Sitting in the seat farthest from me also indicated fears regarding the student/teacher relationship.

Classroom activities. Although Ed's attendance was good, he was hesitant to participate orally. He distanced himself from others physically and by his lack of discussion. He pulled away from me during the first peer editing session and expected me to tell him how to improve his paper without discussion. When I asked him clarification questions about his essay, he blushed. His failure to read the textbook essay

for a short test indicated his general disinterest. Due to past educational experiences and people's feelings about him, Ed no longer had high expectations of himself as a student.

Influence of past attitudes and behaviors. Ed's parents supported and encouraged him, and he had earned a B average in high school without studying much. His study habits followed him to college. Since the idea of homework was unfavorable to him, Ed waited until the last minute to complete assignments. He was mostly interested in receiving electrical training, finding a job, and making a higher income.

The art and craft of writing. Ed's apathy initially prevented him from realizing the benefits of writing or a sense of voice. He viewed writing as an assignment to quickly get out of the way. However, his perceptions of these two areas changed as time passed.

After writing about his negative high school experiences in his journal, Ed decided to use those experiences as the writing topic for his first essay. When he selected a topic of meaning for him personally, even though it was painful, he cared enough to utilize the writing process more carefully and began to understand how writing could benefit him.

The other breakthrough came when students were asked to complete a short collaborative writing project about the future of community colleges. After Ed read the three, short handouts I distributed to help students get ideas, he asked me several questions about different technology used at our institution. He was not previously aware of our capabilities.

Then he moved the conversation toward himself and discussed the low opinion his high school classmates and teachers had about students choosing technical routes at two-year colleges. He said, "All the teachers wanted in class were four-year college bound students."

I briefly disclosed part of our college history, making application to the composition course since this student had been attentive but not very excited to "have to" take the course. I stated that when we were a technical institute, students did not have as many opportunities to take general education courses. Now these courses are required to help students become well-rounded and better prepare for society and the work place. I related that in my opinion, students attending our college pursuing technical majors have the best of both worlds.

As I spoke I saw Ed's eyes widen and his upper body lean toward me. I think he finally realized the importance of the general education courses and understood he was also a "college-bound" student although he took a different direction than his four-year college peers. He told me about high school classmates now attending universities where they were in classes with 600 students, which would not be tolerated at our community college. He appreciated all the teachers knowing him by name and caring about his progress.

I felt this was a moment of enlightenment for Ed. He was finally excited about his learning and development and feeling good about himself.

Relationship with the teacher. At first Ed viewed me in the same light as his high school teachers with whom he had difficulties. When I realized this problem after reading his journal, I suspected his negative body language and standoffish behavior reflected Ed's fears that his high school reputation might follow him to college and he would not be totally accepted. I tried to develop our relationship in a different direction by providing positive reinforcement that he was a good student, and I enjoyed his presence in the classroom. I suggested the school board as a wider audience for his essay about high school and smiled at him often. Soon he began to smile back and no longer hesitated to sit next to me at conferences.

Student goals. Since Ed initially stated his sole goal for the class was to receive a passing grade, I used the journal as a means for suggesting goals more worthy of his abilities. After I discovered his B high school grade point average, I realized that grades were meaningful to him, and he most likely downplayed attainment of good grades to mask his fears that he might not be successful. Once Ed realized good grades were possible for him in the writing class, he strove for higher achievement.

Classroom Incident

Several important incidents occurred in the class under study during the semester. The following incident illustrates differing perceptions regarding the importance of writing and describes my feelings of frustration due to those differences. Data sources for this incident include observations/field notes, instructor/researcher journal, and written assignments.

After students submitted their first essays for final assessment, I had the opportunity to assess their total writing skills, including revision. Students had been assigned a personal experience essay so they were free to discuss anything interesting that happened to them. Each student had conferred with me individually and spent almost two hours in peer editing groups providing suggestions to each other. My expectations were high.

Although each student had an excellent story to tell, not everyone took the needed time or effort to complete the revision process. One essay was filled with pronouns so vague it was difficult to follow the story. Another essay did not include commas, which made reading difficult. One piece was quite wordy, and another did not contain much variation of wording.

Students were quite casual when submitting their folders, which they quickly placed on my desk with no comments or sense of embarrassment. One folder was so ripped it almost fell apart, and another contained a picture of a strange dragon.

I was disappointed with a few students' quality of work. These people did not bother to reread after revision. Words were missing or repeated, and misspellings glared from the pages. Although these students corrected errors I had marked in the first draft, they did not follow through and check the rest of their writing to locate recurring errors. They had not been to the learning center or seen me for a second conference. Two people did not use a required folder. Instead they handed me a pile of messy papers. Obviously

they did not use collaboration to its fullest and were not trying to impress me or their peers.

It appeared as if they just wanted to hurry, hand in the essay, and be done with it. Poor study habits and lack of organization were reflected in these essays. These students must not have felt a strong sense of ownership in their essays or pride in their work. Frankly, I would have felt embarrassed to submit work of such poor quality.

Consequences

During the semester several problems and misunderstandings occurred due to differing perceptions regarding the class and writing. This section describes data that answers the second research question, How do my students and I understand real and perceived consequences that arise from various views about writing? This question included the consequences themselves as well as the chains of events leading to various views about writing. Topics for discussion include poor communication, fears and discomfort, boredom, lack of audience consideration, stress, animosity toward the teacher, lack of confidence, and apathy. A character sketch and class incident illustrate consequences that arose during the semester.

Poor Communication

Poor communication, one consequence of conflicting views between students and teacher, was demonstrated in a variety of ways and recorded in field notes and student journals. Students avoided eye contact when they were unsure of their skills, unprepared,

negative toward writing or education, or mistrusting of their peers or me. A few male students wore baseball caps which made eye contact difficult.

Evasive body language was also observed. One student often looked out the window during class discussion. During the first student/teacher conference two students tried to slide the empty chair next to me across the table so they wouldn't have to sit as close. During the first peer editing a group of three males remained sitting in a row instead of facing each other. One of the students was reading a novel, while the others stared in front of them.

Oral communication suffered when students felt anxious. Some students would not volunteer during class discussion, and when I asked questions only provided brief answers.

Communication among students became particularly strained when poor attending students expected extra help from their peers or additional attention from me during class time. Students who worked hard felt their time was wasted helping apathetic peers. Using class time to repeat information provided previously caused boredom for students who were prepared. One student asked me why his poor- attending peer bothered to enroll in college. Peer groups were sometimes short a member, causing less feedback and hard feelings.

Fears and Discomfort

Students develop many fears about writing when they lack confidence or have felt unsuccessful in the past. Fear can occur when we write for an audience because we

disclose something about ourselves, and the readers will learn about us as individuals. Maybe others can see we're not perfect because we have spelling or grammatical errors. We might feel embarrassed that our message isn't as accurate as we would wish. Readers might therefore criticize us. Also, we might feel we have nothing worthwhile to say and are intimidated by the ideas of being judged by others.

Data sources about fears and discomfort included observations/field notes, instructor/researcher journal, student interviews, individual student journals, and written assignments. One fear of students in the study was the unknown element of the college composition class. In high school some students were taught writing with a different, more traditional approach. Peer editing also caused anxiety initially. One student said he felt "stupid" when other people read his writing because he used "little words" and had poor organization. Another student did not trust her peer group members because they were strangers. The students who were used to a competitive environment did not see the value of collaboration.

Students usually waited for me as the teacher to give them information without taking responsibility for discovering on their own. Especially at the beginning of the semester students were reticent to make any choices when offered. In the words of one student, "I don't have any concerns about this class, because I figure everything I need to know will be presented to me."

Some students felt uncomfortable in the college environment in general because the surroundings and procedures were different from high school. At first they avoided

unknown classmates, asked for help in locating offices and understanding regulations, and displayed confusion. One woman felt as if everyone stared at her because she was a new student. Another student felt lost the first week, and a third said, "You never know what to expect or do on the first couple days of a new class."

Students in the study were particularly uncomfortable with three elements of the writing class. First, several male students had difficulty concentrating when they had to sit still since they were used to being physically active. Signs of poor concentration included whispering and wiggling in seats. Near the beginning of the semester it often took these students awhile to start concentrating on in-class writing projects.

Second, students were not used to writing for long periods of time. A class looping exercise took fifteen minutes with a short break after five minutes. Students would shake their fingers and whisper, "My hand is tired." Their typing on the computer was slow, and they lost concentration quickly.

Third, many students had never written an essay of three pages before. Lack of organization and difficulty deciding on a topic indicated lack of experience. One student told me he would have to "b.s." his way through a three-page paper since he did not know how else to fill the pages. One student tried changing the margins on the page and increasing the type size to fill his pages rather than expanding his ideas.

One result of such fears was misunderstanding of assignments or expectations. Students who had a set perception of writing initially had difficulty accepting new possibilities.

Boredom

Students whose ideas about writing differ from the teacher's may claim boredom toward the subject or the class. I believe that sometimes the word boredom is used to mask students' fears about writing or used as an excuse for disinterest or lack of commitment in expanding themselves academically. Information about feelings of boredom came from observations/field notes, instructor/researcher journal, student interviews, and written assignments.

Outdated teaching methods such as constant lecture and some activities proved less interesting to students. One student said his high school English teacher portrayed little enthusiasm for the subject, which of course was unmotivating for students. Another student mentioned he only liked reading magazines, indicating possible difficulty he had with longer pieces of text that required deeper analysis.

Watching the reactions of students to class activities provided clues as to the presence of boredom or enthusiasm. Most activities that involved small group work or active writing in class were met with eagerness from students. When class discussion or mini-lessons grew too long, students' concentration lessened.

Lack of Audience Consideration

Students who had little experience writing lengthy essays and those who had basically completed worksheets and memorized spelling lists in their past English classes possessed little consideration of audience. These students saw themselves as the major audience and did not strive for understanding by outside readers. The comment, "This is

good enough for me," also led me to believe that a few students did not care about themselves as a primary audience either. Data sources that indicated perceptions of audience included observations/field notes, instructor/researcher journal, student interviews, individual student journals, and written assignments.

A related writing problem was the use of vague pronouns. When I pointed out the difficulties of understanding sections, a common answer was, "Well, I know what I mean." Providing students with examples of possible connotations was helpful in guiding students to understanding possible audience confusion, although a few students were hesitant to revise. They believed that telling the story was the only important aspect of writing. One student told me, "That's the way it happened," and felt if he changed any part of the wording the original story would not be accurate. Another student stated, "This is my story," resenting suggested changes.

Stress

Stress in many directions resulted in our classroom and was recorded in field notes, instructor/researcher journal, student interviews, and individual student journals. Personal problems weighed heavy on some students' minds and produced poor concentration and truancy. As one student described his friend, "He couldn't get it together enough to attend."

Heavy class loads produced stress in both students and me as the teacher. I was teaching three sections of the beginning composition course in addition to other classes. Often my lunch was eaten in a few minutes, I stayed after hours to confer with students,

and I took portfolios home at night for assessment. Some students felt swamped with homework, sometimes causing late submissions or coming to class unprepared. As one student reminded me, "You have to remember we're taking other classes too."

When either teacher or student needs were not met, there was resulting stress. After spending much time trying to help students become successful, I felt disappointed in myself when I could not motivate or retain students. A few students felt disappointed in themselves when their work was not satisfactory or when they did not have enough time to adequately prepare.

Animosity Toward the Teacher

Students who resented "having" to take the beginning composition course as a requirement for their major or who possessed negative feelings toward writing initially displayed animosity toward me as the teacher. Evidence of such animosity was recorded in observations/field notes, instructor/researcher journal, individual student journals, and written assignments. The first day of class negative body language signaled students who did not want to be in class. Several of the electrician students asked me throughout the semester, "Why do we have to take this class?" Sometimes students blamed me if they were unsuccessful; for example, a student said he failed the class because I did not like him.

Another signal of discomfort toward me was displayed during conferences. Although I placed two chairs together, a couple of students tried to move their chair away from me. Students were concerned that conferences would be a time to cut them down or

look solely for errors on their assignments. One student related, "I hope you don't find too many mistakes."

Evaluation also produced stress between some students and me when I asked them to assess themselves in journal entries or self-assessment forms used after each essay assignment. A few students were also hesitant to complete peer editing sheets, saying they were "stupid." These individuals saw evaluation as solely from teacher to student and appeared to resent the responsibility of assessment.

Lack of Confidence

Lack of confidence was revealed by hesitancy to show me writing, lack of eye contact, and unwillingness to speak during class discussion. Data sources included observations/field notes, instructor/researcher journal, individual student journals, and written assignments. On an information sheet distributed the first day of class, students disclosed several areas of discomfort in writing and expressed lack of confidence in early journal entries. Students were able to list several areas of weakness in writing but few strengths. Several students wrote, "I don't have any strengths in writing."

I also noticed the abundance of negative self-talk during the beginning of the semester. Such perceptions were often based on past experiences. Some individuals put themselves down as both writers and students, not believing success was within their grasp. One student wrote, "I've never been good at writing," thinking it was impossible to ever improve his writing skills.

Apathy

Signs of apathy were apparent in several ways and recorded in observations/field notes and individual student journals. Shallow writing in journals and such comments as, "I'll never have to write a journal in my profession," indicated lack of interest in self-assessment and little effort.

A case of plagiarism showed lack of caring about the student's own voice and little pride in his work. Although he admitted he realized plagiarism was wrong, he said he was just trying to save time.

Poor attendance also indicated apathy. Education was obviously not important to some students. Poor quality assignments and missed deadlines reflected students' lack of effort. When students did recognize weaknesses in themselves as students or writers, they were not always motivated to change. One student wrote, "My biggest problem with writing is I'm lazy. I wait until the last minute to do it." Waiting did not give him enough time to think through a topic or adequately revise. Another student said, "I like to write only if it's something I'm interested in." Unfortunately, he could not list many interests.

Student apathy and negative behavior affected all members of the class negatively. Feelings were hurt, students asked not to be grouped with certain individuals, and students would not face each other when working in groups. A sarcastic remark caused reticence to speak during class discussion in fear of being the brunt of another remark.

The greatest consequence was the need for some students to withdraw from the course or face a failing grade due to uncompleted assignments.

Character Sketch

The following character sketch describes a student who displayed much apathy throughout the semester and problems related to lack of focus. This sketch was developed to illustrate possible consequences that may arise from various views about composition. Data sources for this sketch included observations/field notes, instructor/researcher journal, student interviews, student records, individual student journals, and written assignments.

Andrew let out an audible yawn as he strode into class late. His body language matched his statement that he needed to "be in the mood" to write. The unfinished assignments, blank test answers, and lack of preparation indicated he was not often in the mood.

Although Andrew had been out of high school for three years, he had not accomplished much. Previously he worked in a factory. Currently he was taking general education courses in college without a focus on a major, career, or future goals. He wrote, "Once I became a teenager I never really thought about my future. Right now I don't know what I want to end up doing. I would like to be a rock star but I can't sing or play any instruments so this isn't very realistic." My attempts to encourage him to meet with our career counselor went unheeded.

Andrew wrote in his journal that his only interests in life were "smoking, music, and partying with friends." His first essay described how to have fun at a rock concert. He detailed exciting fights, the importance of bringing enough liquor, and the foul language used. He warned about not bringing a female date due to the possibility of assault by strangers. I suggested he delete reference to marijuana since there were high school students in our class, but Andrew decided it was all part of the fun.

He missed class every Friday. When he returned the following session, he sometimes sat in a chair looking lost. On other occasions he asked, "Did I miss anything?" as if most class periods were a waste of time.

Although I tried to lead Andrew to more mature topics, encourage him to participate more fully in class, and help him understand the value of education, he became more distant as the semester progressed. His attendance in all his classes lessened, his concentration dropped even lower, and he soon stopped coming to class altogether.

Andrew's story reflects the consequences discovered from the data relating to differing perceptions in a composition class. Each following area is related to Andrew's problems fitting into the class environment.

Poor communication. Although not due to poor writing skills, Andrew had a difficult time communicating in the class. Because he missed class so much, he was usually lost, and he portrayed strong feelings of apathy. Other students did not want to work with him because he was unreliable, so he usually sat alone unless I assigned

groups. Other students felt they did not have much in common with Andrew, and he especially felt out of place with the electrician students since he had no interest in technical areas. He even described himself as "antisocial," adding, "I don't worry about making any friends around here."

Fears and discomfort. Disclosure appeared to be Andrew's biggest fear about writing. He was careful not to let peers learn much about him personally and said he did not like to write about himself. Each time I placed students in groups I asked them to first introduce themselves. I noticed that Andrew did not participate in those introductions except to give his name. After he told me that he was called a nickname in high school and some friends did not even know his first name, I wondered if Andrew's sense of identity was at stake.

Boredom. Andrew displayed little enthusiasm for most class activities. One reason for boredom might have been his unwillingness to select worthwhile topics. He tried to pick topics safe from personal disclosure, which he did not appear to have enjoyed writing. One essay dealt with the topic of the lack of a God and the hypocrisy of religion. Without connecting his own experiences, Andrew could not think of many in-depth comments to add.

Lack of audience consideration. Andrew felt the other students were beneath him and told me he could learn nothing from them so the peer editing groups were a waste of time. One reason for his feelings may have been he was three years older than most of the other students. Since he thought his peers and I were his only audience, and he did

not want us to learn anything about him personally, he could not take advantage of the benefits of considering a wider audience. Rather than writing to learn about himself, he told me he completed assignments only because they were required for a grade.

Stress. Obviously Andrew had some stress in his life. There were unresolved family relationships and financial issues. His attitude also caused stress in the class. As Andrew became less engaged in the class, other students distanced themselves from him. His sighs and comments about boredom made other students feel his lack of interest in them as well as the class. I felt stress because my attempts to motivate Andrew were unsuccessful.

Animosity toward the teacher. Although Andrew did not direct animosity toward me as a person, he seemed resentful of some activities I presented, particularly those involving group work. He missed several conferences we had scheduled in advance and did not contact me to say he would not attend. I felt that he did not respect my time. Also, he did not use several of my suggestions for revision.

Lack of confidence. The role of a student did not seem to match Andrew's image of himself. His work in a factory had not been satisfying, but the life of a student involves a commitment of time and energy. Andrew's sketchy journal indicated he did not view himself as a strong student, and possibly he talked himself out of becoming one.

Apathy. Apathy was Andrew's biggest problem. He did not seem to care much about his progress and stated, "I have never tried at anything." In his journal he wrote he realized he should be receiving an A, but was earning a C at the time because he had been

"lazy." I suspected his drug and alcohol abuse contributed to attendance and apathy problems.

Classroom Incident

Throughout the semester, it became apparent that not resolving differences in perceptions would bring negative consequences. The following incident relates one class period where a poor functioning group evolved. Data sources for this incident include observations/field notes, instructor/researcher journal, and written assignments.

To further engage students' thinking about writing and allow them to practice working in groups, view varied writing styles, and remind them of grammatical and mechanical concerns, I provided exercises before assigning the first graded essay. In one exercise, students had to bring four newspaper articles. Knowing that not everyone purchased a newspaper, I suggested that students contact a neighbor, relative, or fellow student or ask our college library for a past issue of the many newspapers received. Then I put students into groups of three or four to look at differences in tone and writing style among their articles. It was interesting to note how each group approached the assignment. One group sat in a straight line not talking to each other. Another group began reading each article aloud so all members could hear. A third group passed around articles for each member to read silently. A fourth group started discussing the articles and the project.

Three students did not bother to bring the required articles. I did not feel it was fair to the prepared students to expect them to work for the others. I sent the three men to

the library to get articles, and I put them together in a separate group so as not to waste the others' time. They worked half-heartedly on the exercise upon return. Possibly they felt the exercise was not worth their time since it would not be graded.

Each group was provided a worksheet that asked students to identify particular features of each article and make comparisons. The group containing the unprepared men was not on task. They sat in a line not speaking to each other. When I walked to their side, one student asked, "What do you want us to do now?"

Since I wanted them to take leadership of their own group, I replied, "You decide as a group what direction you wish to take."

However, this group still did not function well, so I pulled up a chair and sat with them. I asked them to briefly describe each article to me. I questioned them about the use of quotations, descriptions, and photographs. After they began discussion, I moved to another group and quietly listened to their comments.

After analyzing the day's events I decided that one reason the one group did not function well was because I had provided no instruction about how to develop a cohesive group. Since I was working with college students, I assumed they would already possess such skills. Such assumptions on my part proved false. I forgot how each group and each individual can differ. Even though students may have worked in groups before, the type of group and training could have differed from my expectations. Other students might have felt uncomfortable completing such a project with unfamiliar classmates. Some

students needed more direction than I had initially given, and the consequence was a group that functioned poorly.

Resolution of Various Views

Although conflicts exist in any classroom setting including the class represented in this study, there are ways that problems can be resolved. This section addresses the third research question, How could my students and I mediate or resolve various views about writing? Areas in this section include modeling, writing connections, developing relationships, collaboration, varied activities, and goal setting. A character sketch and class incident are included to illustrate resolution of varied views.

Modeling

Although several students entered our writing classroom with negative attitudes or misperceptions, a variety of modeling activities helped students understand new approaches and develop more positive attitudes. Information about modeling was recorded in observations/field notes, instructor/researcher journal, student interviews, individual student journals, and written assignments.

Reading my own work was one important modeling activity because it helped students to understand me better and realize I am a practicing writer. I showed samples of articles published in professional journals and told students the steps I went through in writing and publishing. I also read from a manuscript in progress, and student questions following the reading showed their interest. In addition, I demonstrated some of my

favorite writing techniques, explained why they worked for me, and discussed how I developed them over time.

When I assigned groups, I changed members often and asked students to introduce themselves to unfamiliar classmates. Modeling the first day of class gave students a format to follow throughout the semester.

Another skill I modeled was organization. The detailed syllabus distributed the first day of class helped the students organize their time and materials. They better understood expectations and could view the direction of the class. I felt less stress because I had carefully laid out the class in advance in such a way that I could also remain flexible. I actively discussed organization, and several students commented that I was well organized. Students were required to submit assigned essays in a portfolio with all process materials and complete journals in a specific format. As I helped students organize in the composition class, they hopefully used similar strategies in other classes.

Using professional writings were useful in modeling effective writing, audience consideration, word choice, and topic selection. Several students used similar topics as text examples for their own essays. They easily articulated why they liked or disliked a text essay, and stated how they might write a similar essay. Although several students initially said they were not confident in analyzing essays, class discussion provided a model that students could easily follow.

Since group activity was an important part of the course, I demonstrated effective group techniques and briefly sat with groups throughout the semester to monitor group

practices and provide suggestions for successful collaboration. Students who had not collaborated in such a way initially felt confused by peer editing, but a video and demonstration of me reading one of my works provided a model.

An important aspect of modeling was that it gave students time to adjust to a new educational environment, feel more confident about writing in general, become acquainted with classmates, and begin to trust me as the teacher. Students mentioned they were glad to have time to think before "jumping right in" and gradually begin class projects.

Writing Connections

A common complaint of students was their belief that writing was not important to them personally or professionally. Therefore, relating various aspects of writing to the students' personal and professional lives helped them appreciate writing as a useful rather than purely academic skill. Students could thereby use writing as a tool for discovery and communication. Information about perceptions of writing connections was accessed through observations/field notes, student interviews, individual student journals, and written assignments.

Two letter writing assignments were assigned to help students understand audience by writing to a real individual who would respond. The first assignment involved writing a letter to an assigned peer who was required to answer the letter. The second assignment involved writing to college students in Poland whose teacher would require them to respond. These projects produced immediate, lively conversation. Also,

using peer editing groups gave students peers as part of their audience who would respond by critiquing essays and providing support.

Developing Relationships

The student/teacher relationship can have a fragile beginning when students enter a class with negative attitudes and feelings of apathy or if misperceptions exist between students and their teacher. However, several ways of thinking and dealing with students in the study improved our relationships. Data sources regarding the student/teacher relationship included observations/field notes, instructor/researcher journal, student interviews, individual student journals, and written assignments.

By treating students' life stories as valuable, I helped students feel important and realize they had something worthwhile to say. Several students came to my office or stayed after class to discuss personal events and actually thanked me for listening. Treating students as individuals instead of just class members enforced students' feelings of value.

Although I had three sections of the composition class, I let the student make-up drive the class culture, realizing each class was different. Remembering my own experiences as a student and listening to students in the study make comparisons between our class and high school experiences, helped me focus on the particular needs of the present students. Learning as much background information as possible about each student helped me understand their writing habits, provide writing topics when asked, and direct individual learning. Using positive comments on final drafts instead of solely

instructional notations showed students they were progressing and let them realize they were appreciated.

Collaboration

Probably the most successful means of resolving differences was the use of collaboration, including the use of small groups of students and teacher/student conferences. Data resources that provided information about collaboration included observations/field notes, instructor/researcher journal, student interviews, individual student journals, and written assignments.

Later in the semester most students became very positive about using peer editing groups and said their group members provided effective suggestions for revision, topic ideas, general support, and ideas for expansion and clarity. The groups gave students an opportunity to meet new people and have fun in class. Several students felt proud that they were able to help peers and provide input into others' essays.

As students worked together, they learned about different views, styles of writing, and a variety of topics. Students realized that their peers possessed many of the same concerns and fears about writing and education, thereby feeling more secure in the college environment.

One outcome of collaboration and the personal nature of writing was individual conversations outside class. Students often continued discussing writing topics with each other after class, and I saw them together in the hallways at other times. One student began giving his partner a ride to class, and another helped a classmate after class with

computers. Several students began to stay after class to talk personally with me, telling me about upcoming vacations, high school successes, and difficulties growing up. Two students shared poetry they wrote outside class.

The second major outcome was the sense of trust that developed among classmates and between students and me. Students were honest yet tactful and discussed strengths as well as weaknesses in partners' writings. As the semester progressed, students began sharing personal information without hesitation. They joked kindly, greeted each other before class, and smiled a lot.

A third major outcome was increased confidence in themselves as writers and students as shown by more mature and detailed writing, expanded and more positive comments during class discussion, and more assistance offered during peer editing. After students realized their ideas would not be put down or minimized, they came to understand how we could help each other strengthen a document and offer support in many ways. Students actually began to view themselves as writers--a few people asking me how they could try publishing their writing.

Varied Activities

Providing a variety of activities produced mental and physical stimulation and added interest in writing. Often when I switched activities or presented material in an innovative manner, I would notice change in body language. Students would lean toward me and make more eye contact. Information about activity results was gathered through

observations/field notes, instructor/researcher journal, course materials, individual student journals, and written assignments.

One successful activity was the use of creating techniques with each major essay assignment. Although students jokingly complained that their hands became tired when writing, they usually concentrated, and excellent topic ideas were produced. Students even suggested particular creating techniques to peers having difficulty selecting topics.

Mini-lessons proved helpful in students gaining more comfort and confidence in writing. Grammatical mini-lessons completed orally helped students learn as a group and make a stronger connection with our handbook. Lessons completed in small groups allowed students to help each other and solve problems jointly without concern about grades. Students said that reviewing grammatical elements in class helped them recall past learning they had not put to use recently. They often tried new words, grammatical constructions, and sentence structure after I had discussed them in class. When I referred to mini-lessons during conferences, students were usually able to discover individual errors connected with previous discussions.

Using each activity several times throughout the semester set patterns in the class that helped students know what to expect and feel more comfortable. When I was absent one day, students were expected to work in groups without a teacher present. One student wrote in his journal that he was surprised the help peers gave each other even when there was no teacher to "make" them work.

Goal Setting

Developing goals for the class as a whole as well as recognizing individual goals gave more purpose to students. As trust and a sense of community were developed, students were more apt to help each other and realize similar goals. As I learned more about each student, I could help individuals pursue goals regarding themselves as writers and students. Data sources regarding goal setting included observations/field notes, instructor/researcher journal, student interviews, individual student journals, and written assignments.

As students began to use writing to make sense of personal difficulties, they better understood themselves and the place of writing in their lives. Several students selected problems in their high schools or families as writing topics in order to explore solutions.

In addition, high expectations showed students I believed them to be intelligent, important people. After peer editing groups developed, support from peers also motivated students to believe in themselves. One student wrote, "When I started class, I didn't think I could do it. I surprised myself."

As students realized the importance of writing, became more comfortable in the class, and began to develop goals, their minds opened to new ideas. They became more positive about the class and realized the relevance of writing to them personally. In journals students wrote about the influence reading and writing had on each other, ways they were applying new strategies, incorporating personal experiences into essays to provide additional interest, readability and audience consideration, improving word

choice, and raising self-esteem. As one student wrote, "I can use my strengths to raise my weaknesses by setting goals. I will take care of them gradually and raise them up to better standards." Another student wrote he felt proud of himself because he was producing the best writing ever.

Character Sketch

The following character sketch describes a student who initially did not view herself as a successful writer. The student's perceptions of writing changed in a positive direction during the semester as she fully engaged herself in each element of the writing process and classroom community. This sketch was developed through data recorded in observations/field notes, instructor/researcher journal, student interviews, individual student journals, and written assignments.

Diane was an extremely shy young woman. She came from a very small high school graduating class, and her parents encouraged her attendance at college. She was enrolled in a medical related major. Although she told me she knew nothing about her major, her enthusiasm for learning was apparent. During high school she had toured a medical facility, was impressed by the site, and decided she wanted to work in a similar setting.

Diane's first draft of the initial assignment showed little effort. She had not used spell check, sentences were incompiete, and the paper lacked organization and cohesion. Yet she kept an open mind as indicated in her journal. "I think that it's alright to take

comp. in college. I can always use help. I still spell like a 7th grader and don't want to make a fool of myself at the job by not punctuating something right."

Diane did not see herself as a writer. The only time she wrote in high school was for required assignments, and she had never written an essay over one page. Mostly she had completed grammatical worksheets and learned vocabulary and spelling words.

After reading an essay in our text dealing with family relationships, Diane decided to write her second essay about her relationship with her sisters, who she described as pests. Diane had experienced a sense of belonging in her peer editing group, and was beginning to feel more comfortable with me as the teacher. On occasion she stayed after class to tell me a little about her life.

Diane worked much harder on her second assignment. She had selected a story of meaning to her. She wanted to share her frustrations and entertain her audience, who were finally real people to her. As her confidence increased, she became more willing to share experiences during class discussion. She had conferences with me twice, instead of settling for the one required meeting, in order to perfect her writing. She visited the learning center for additional assistance and began to talk more with previously unfamiliar classmates. Soon her appearance changed with a new hairstyle and trendy clothing, and her work and speech exuded more confidence.

By the end of the semester Diane had changed from an insecure writer to someone who better understood her own process of writing. Since she had begun to better understand grammatical elements after discussion in conferences and mini-lessons, she

could write with more ease. Writing for a real audience helped her realize the importance of her words and experiences. Connecting writing with her major produced added enthusiasm.

The following information ties Diane's story to the data from the research. Each main category is listed, and analysis is related to the character described.

Modeling. Modeling was a very effective technique for Diane. She was a careful observer and learned from other students as well as me. She tried writing strategies used by authors in text essays and discussed in class mini-lessons. During conferences I wrote sample sentences, explaining how to develop a complete sentence and identify weak pronouns that should be deleted. Diane's writing improved as she actively analyzed the models and connected them with her own writing.

Writing connections. Diane used the writing assignments to consider topics of importance to her own life. In one essay she wrote about her opinion on a topic she wanted to better verbalize. In her journal she said she was beginning to recognize how writing for different purposes and audiences would help her in the health information field.

Developing relationships. Initially Diane was quite shy with her peers and me. After she wrote the first draft about her relationship with her sisters, I described the relationship I had with my siblings as a teenager and laughed with her as she related some funny experiences. Diane seemed to open up afterwards because of our shared experiences. I think she realized my purpose was not to judge her, but to assist her

writing progression. The personal contact and our laughter gave a more personal context to our relationship.

Collaboration. Diane's shyness with her peers quickly dissipated once she became acquainted with them. I think it was helpful that I assigned groups so she was forced to meet new people. She became an excellent group member and actively provided suggestions for revision and support for peers. One student volunteered to help her become better acquainted with computers and stayed after class to sit next to her in the computer lab. As Diane's relationships strengthened, so did her confidence in herself.

Varied activities. Diane enjoyed several of the class writing activities because they were new to her. She said no one had explained certain grammatical rules before, and it was helpful for her to understand why the rules existed. She even took a leadership role on occasion in small groups and remained on task when completing in-class exercises. She soon took risks in speaking aloud and trying new writing strategies.

Goal setting. As Diane saw her writing improve, she began to set achievable writing goals for herself. She wanted to use more professional words and make her sentences clearer as well as become a better speller. She set higher standards for herself as a student, and the quality of her work as well as the effort she made quickly rose.

Classroom Incident

Several times throughout the semester members of the class worked to resolve differences. The following incident describes a breakthrough in the class that helped

several students change their attitudes about writing. Information about this incident was recorded in field notes, instructor/researcher journal, and written assignments.

For the last three years, I have been using a letter writing project the first week of class to introduce students to each other. During the semester of the study I also tried this activity. After the first day of class, I made note of where students sat. I also had the student information sheets that listed names, addresses, ages, and majors. I could make an educated guess as to which students did not know each other and pair them for the project.

The second day of class students were asked to write a letter to an assigned partner. I gave students about 10 minutes to talk, become slightly acquainted, and exchange correct spellings of names. Then I allowed 15 minutes to write a letter regarding any questions or concerns about the writing process or the class. On an overhead I provided a model of the assignment.

When I paired students for this assignment, the classroom immediately took on a different atmosphere. This quiet, nervous group of people began chatting and chuckling. I heard such comments as, "How do you spell your name again?" "Where are you from?" Most pairs socialized, asked about common acquaintances, and discussed themselves. Soon the class became quiet as students began writing their letters. A couple of students called me over to inquire hesitantly, "Will we really give these letters to our partners?"

"Yes, I replied. That is the objective of the assignment."

The hesitation in these voices, I believe, came from the fear that can arise from showing another person oneself on paper. As I mentioned to students later in class, fear can occur when we write for an audience because we disclose something about ourselves, and the reader will learn about us as individuals. Maybe others can see we are not perfect because we have spelling or grammatical errors. We might feel embarrassed that our message is not as accurate as we would wish. Readers might therefore criticize us. Also, we might feel we have nothing worthwhile to say and are intimidated by the idea of being judged by others. Yet all the students in the class took a chance on a classmate, wrote about their concerns, and exchanged letters.

This writing exercise was important because it gave students a chance to write for a real audience. Although they knew I would be reading their letters, some of the negative comments about writing indicated that they did not consider me part of the audience. Most students wrote meaningful questions and comments to their partners. Responses included honest advice and empathy.

At the end of the class period, students were still lively. After class a few pairs remained to continue discussion from their letters. The next class period a very shy, young woman became more animated because she felt more comfortable with her classmates and began to view them as real audience members who would respond to her writing. She had previously made no attempt to communicate with her peers, but I noticed her whisper answers to my questions in group discussion to her classmate. Later in the semester she would venture to volunteer her answers aloud.

Main Themes

The results of the study can be broken into three main themes that intertwine among all of the three research questions. These themes are:

1. How students viewed themselves as writers and students based on past experiences influenced their present attitudes and behaviors.

2. Effective collaboration was important in strengthening a classroom culture.

3. Developing goals helped students understand the relevancy and importance of writing. Each of these themes will be discussed below.

The first main theme is how students viewed themselves as writers and students based on past experiences influenced their present attitudes and behaviors. Most students entering the beginning composition class had preconceived notions about how they would fit into the classroom environment. These ideas were based on past experiences in educational settings, family influences, and self-expectations. The way participants in the study viewed themselves as students and writers influenced their positive or negative self-talk, level of comfort, confidence, and fears.

Information regarding this theme was revealed mainly through individual student journals. I gave several journal prompts that asked students to assess their strengths and weaknesses in writing, describe positive and negative learning experiences, and discuss their attitudes about themselves as learners. Some students described specific incidents that helped mold a particular way of thinking, while others presented general feelings about their abilities.

Students with positive feelings about themselves as students and writers developed that image due to family support, small class sizes in high school that provided individual attention, and the ability to understand their skills and the need to improve them. Since they had felt successful as students in the past, they expected the same outcome in the present and knew how to ask questions and seek assistance when necessary.

Other students were used to putting little effort into their assignments during high school, knowing they would "get by." They did not view themselves as master students. As one student wrote, when he was in high school he had "other things" on his mind (i.e., his car, job, and girlfriend) than school. Students who viewed themselves as mediocre students or writers felt their ideas were not worth sharing, did not understand the value of learning for bettering themselves instead of just receiving a grade, and felt a lack of empowerment.

Students who stated they were "bad" writers did not feel they could improve, and they based their definition on problems with mechanics and grammar. Individuals expressing a sense of discomfort with part of the writing process had not analyzed why they felt uncomfortable and had not learned how to assess themselves. Some male students were embarrassed to admit they possessed strong writing skills since their high school definition of a writer was not part of the "macho" image expected of them by classmates.

Negative preconceived notions sometimes changed as students began to experience success and consequently more confidence in themselves. Since it usually takes many years to build particular attitudes, change is a slow process, and students who stated they "hated" writing at the beginning of the semester did not suddenly express admiration for the subject. However, many students began to see a stronger connection with writing and started to view themselves as writers.

This theme is important because it provided insight into the reasons behind particular attitudes. Helping students understand their self-image and self-expectations by analyzing experiences that developed attitudes was important in promoting success in a new educational situations. Some students who set negative patterns were led to realize alternatives when they looked inward and reflected on past influences.

The second main theme is effective collaboration is important in strengthening a classroom culture. Classroom collaboration included a variety of activities. Using small groups and peer editing promoted shared understanding among classmates, modeled differing approaches to writing, opened minds to varied topics and interpretations, and provided a support network. Positive, caring relationships usually developed as students were instructed in group processes and used these processes to complete assignments and help each other in a variety of ways.

The students and I learned from each other when we worked together. As we collaborated to develop stronger documents, students viewed me in a more positive

manner. Some students began to seek my advice and ask me questions, treating me as an expert instead of an enforcer or task master.

Information about this theme came primarily from my observations and field notes and secondarily from individual student journals and written assignments. I observed many examples of increased confidence by physical changes in students including body language, appearance, and eye contact. In journals students indicated the many positive effects of collaboration such as integrating strategies used by peers, becoming more comfortable with writing due to peer and instructor support, giving as well as receiving input, developing a routine with group members, and learning new ideas never before considered. As one student commented, "I was able to touch my reader."

Throughout the semester collaboration increased as the students and I learned more about each other and thereby better understood each others' backgrounds, concerns, and needs. Our class became more lively, and the conversation became more open. Relationships were based on friendship as well as class membership, and students came to feel equal to each other. As the negative students withdrew from the class, the remaining students pulled even closer together, and a strong sense of trust pervaded the classroom.

The theme of collaboration strengthening a classroom culture is important because it explains one way a positive culture is developed. As the students and I worked more closely together and became comfortable with each other, students became more open in discussing their concerns and ideas, asked more questions, and took risks with their

writing. Smiles and laughter developed more freely, while fears about being put down were no longer expressed. As the students and I worked together instead of in isolation, we had more fun, learning was enhanced, and a sense of unity was developed.

The third main theme is developing goals can help students understand relevancy and importance of writing. Due to the nature of the subject, the classroom environment of a writing class may differ from other subjects. Therefore, setting goals specific to writing helped individuals feel more successful and allowed the class as a whole to develop in a particular direction instead of students becoming isolated from each other.

Information about this theme was revealed in individual student journals, observations/field notes, instructor/researcher journal, and written assignments. Particularly in student journals I noticed that students began to develop goals related to strengthening their writing. Examples included incorporating personal experience with general topics to provide illustration, using more colorful vocabulary to add interest, raising standards of writing, paying more attention to details, becoming better organized, connecting writing with technical courses, explaining ideas more fully, presenting more than one side in an argument, and showing more thought and feeling.

The goals of expressing one's own voice and considering audience were especially important because they involved the whole class as a unit. As students developed a better understanding of voice and audience, they worked with peers and me to explain their point of view to real people. Although students learned to write for an extended audience, they used class participants as a check for understanding. Several

students said they felt proud of their final drafts, and classmates were pleased to acknowledge the importance of their input in peers' essays.

Students who did not develop personal goals related to the class and who did not accept group goals did not complete the course. These individuals did not seem to grasp the importance of setting a desired outcome and moving in that direction and did not value input of peers. They tended to isolate themselves by not fully participating with the rest of the class.

The theme of setting goals was significant because without direction students were confused and unable to focus on ways to strengthen their writing. Individual goals personalized writing and helped students connect career goals with the subject. Peer editing group goals allowed students to provide stronger support for each other and work in a team. Class writing goals developed unity and created a comfortable environment with shared understanding.

Contradictions

Although my main goal as a teacher was to help all students in the class obtain a feeling of success, students responded in differing ways. Not all data in the study supported positive conclusions about resolving various views about writing during the semester, and not all students successfully completed the course.

There were many conflicts throughout the semester as discussed earlier in this chapter. Conflicts occurred among students, between students and me, inside students as

they changed views, and inside me as I analyzed student progress and concerns. Many of these conflicts were resolved. However, not all problems were solved.

My high expectations with time available for assistance did not hold all students. Although I tried various avenues for retaining students (calling them at home, giving their names to the college counselor, offering extra assistance, and encouraging attendance at the learning center), several students withdrew from the course or just stopped coming.

Two women who were failing due to poor attendance and lack of assignment completion visited with me about switching to an earlier section with another teacher. One woman claimed a baby-sitting problem, and the other said her work schedule had changed. Their unproductive behavior continued, and both women failed the course with the other instructor.

A young male without an attendance problem would not complete his written assignments. He told me he could write okay but not within a scheduled time frame. One day I sat next to him and wrote an outline he could use to develop the topic of his choice. When I saw him in the computer lab later, he was using the Internet and told me he could not concentrate on writing that day. Another day he discussed his assignment progress as, "I have it in my head but haven't had time to write it." He would not complete any assignments and refused to seek assistance so I recommended he audit the course instead of drop so he could better prepare for the next semester. Unfortunately, after receiving audit status he stopped attending class.

A nursing student who was married with two children stopped attending after she learned she had a hereditary disease. A student with a past history of drug and alcohol abuse and light criminal activity could not put his personal problems aside enough to remain focused on his education. A young woman who wrote in her journal about her love of frequenting bars and drinking alcohol soon lost interest in the class and dropped.

These students did not have the maturity level or interest to engage themselves in the course or had personal problems that weighed on their minds. My attempts to motivate them, place them in supportive group settings, or provide individual options were not enough to pull students through the course.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed data from the study that answered the three research questions:

1. How do my perceptions as a writing instructor in a beginning community college composition course compare with my students' perceptions?

2. How do my students and I understand real and perceived consequences that arise from various views about writing?

3. How could my students and I mediate or resolve various views about writing? Examples, details, and sketches were provided to support the data.

Several areas of differing perceptions were discovered. Classroom activities that produced conflict throughout the semester included attendance, working collaboratively with peers and the teacher, question/answer techniques, testing as a transferable skill, and

expectations of the class and teacher. Areas that influenced students' attitudes toward the present educational setting were family influences, study skills, homework, hands-on versus intellectual activities, and high school experiences. Topic selection, overemphasis of grammar, benefits of the writing approach, finding voice, journal usage, creativity, and students viewing themselves as writers were specific aspects of writing that produced varied perceptions. In addition, students did not perceive me or my role in the same way I perceived myself, and our goals sometimes clashed.

Consequences resulting from various views about writing included poor communication, fears and discomfort about writing, boredom, lack of audience consideration, stress, animosity toward me as the teacher, lack of student confidence, and apathy. These consequences affected all members of the classroom.

Effective means of resolving various views included modeling, developing writing connections, collaborating, offering varied activities, and setting goals. Resolving differences was important in producing a stronger sense of community in the classroom and shared understanding among students and between the students and me.

Three main themes that connected with all of the research questions include:

1. How students viewed themselves as writers and students based on past experiences influenced their present attitudes and behaviors.

2. Effective collaboration was important in strengthening a classroom culture.

3. Developing goals helped students understand the relevancy and importance of writing.

These main themes are important because they provide insight into ways the students and I mediated our differences. Chapter 5 will link this information with the research, incorporating information from other bodies of knowledge with findings from the study. This chapter will analyze ways my findings support the literature review and ways my findings extend the review. The main themes will be discussed and implications given, and changes in students' attitudes and perceptions will be addressed.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to investigate community college students' and their teacher's perceptions about writing in a beginning composition course. Specifically, a broad concern was how instructor and student views could be reconciled given conceptually complicated views about writing.

Chapter 5 presents the discussion and implications of the study. Based on the analysis in Chapter 4, findings from the study are compared with the review of literature in Chapter 2 to show connections between the findings of other researchers and the results of this study. Although many of my findings support the four areas addressed in the literature review (writing influences, nontraditional students, culture and communication in the classroom, and teacher as researcher), the analysis extends other research by viewing composition as being more complicated than previously addressed, particularly because I viewed my students' learning of writing as a complete process instead of separate strategies within that process.

Implications for further research are discussed. Suggestions for follow-up to this study are given.

Research Questions and Discussion

The three research questions used to answer the research problem and brief answers to each question follow.

1. How do my perceptions as a writing instructor in a beginning community college composition course compare with my students' perceptions? Differing perceptions included verbal and nonverbal communication practices, classroom activities, students' relationship with the teacher, the art and craft of writing, and goals. Students and I had formulated varied definitions of good attendance, collaboration, class discussion, learning approaches, testing, and expectations. Regarding writing itself, we did not have the same perceptions of topic selection, the use of grammar, benefits of the process approach, voice, writing journals, creativity, and viewing oneself as a writer. Students' perceptions were influenced by past attitudes and behaviors developed from high school experiences and family expectations.

2. How do my students and I understand real and perceived consequences that arise from various views about writing? A major consequence was poor communication, which was evidenced by evasive body language, avoiding eye contact, minimal oral discussion, and problems related to poor attendance. Fears and discomfort had been developed because many students lacked confidence, were confused by differing teaching approaches, waited for the teacher to provide information, felt uncomfortable with the difference between high school and college, had difficulty concentrating, and were inexperienced in writing for extended periods of time. Other consequences included boredom, lack of audience consideration, stress, animosity toward the teacher, lack of confidence, and apathy.

3. How could my students and I mediate or resolve various views about writing? Resolution of various views occurred by modeling my own writing, writing techniques, organization, and group techniques; helping students make connections between writing and their experiences and majors; developing positive relationships with students; promoting collaboration between the students and me and among students in the class; using varied activities to promote mental and physical stimulation and build more confidence; and setting goals.

Previous literature indicates there are many aspects in students' lives that influence attitudes and perceptions about writing (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1986). Composition is complex activity involving more than physically putting words on paper, and students view writing in different ways based on their past experiences, backgrounds, interests, and goals.

Discussion in this chapter is divided into the same sections listed in the review of literature. Each section contains two parts: (a) the ways my findings support aspects of the literature review and (b) the ways my findings extend aspects of the literature review. A table outlining the main ideas is included (Table 6), and more detailed information follows.

Table 6

Literature and Research Findings

Literature Review	Support of Literature	Extension of Literature
I. Writing Influence		
A. Physical causes	- Left- vs. right-handed - Computer usage	- Personal writing style - Comfort in writing
B. Writing isolation	- Competition for grades - Writing alone	-Tied to classroom culture - Audience consideration
C. Revision	- Sentence-level activity	- Self-concept - Sense of voice - Topic selection - Inexperience
D. Evaluation and assessment	- From teacher to student - Little experience - Look mostly for errors	- Self-evaluation - Constant judgment
E. Grammar emphasis	- Produces boredom - Writing is mechanical - Confusion	- Minimal writing requirements in high school
F. Learning environment	- Differing learning styles - Meaningless tasks equal little motivation	- Students' opinion solicited - Literacy shaped by social interactions
G. Writer's block	- In writing stage	- Also in revision stage
H. Confines of writing	- Sole job of English teacher	- Team teaching
I. Teacher preparation	- Lack of in-depth training	- Ask students' ideas

(table continues)

Literature Review	Support of Literature	Extension of Literature
J. Materials	- Lack of connection	- Teacher develops for students
II. Nontraditional learners	- Uncertain goals - Technical orientation	- Unique, complicated population
III. Classroom culture and communication	- Group competence - Class expectations	- Communication with peers - Student/teacher relationship
IV. Teacher as researcher	- Create strong institution - Transform teaching - Better understand students	- Natural part of class - Look closely at practice - Extend student contact

Writing Influences

Students become apprehensive about writing for a variety of reasons (Daly & Wilson, 1983). Writing apprehension in some students involved in the study as well as some tensions between students and me were resolved. In other instances, students withdrew from the course or stopped attending with no explanation. Several areas addressed in the literature that influence writing perceptions are listed below, and analysis drawn from this study's data is discussed.

Physical causes. Emig (1978) explored problems of writers who concentrate on hand forming letters, and Williamson (1993) wrote about adult students without expert keyboarding skills who find writing tedious. The physical aspects of writing may cause

writers to move their focus away from the message they wish to impart. I discovered physical aspects more complicated than discussed in the literature.

Students in the present study also mentioned physical problems. The left-handed student who was pushed to write with his right hand when young still felt resentful toward writing because he was forced to curtail movements that were natural to him. Students using the "hunt and peck" method of keyboarding spent more time in the physical act of typing their essay assignments than students who felt more at ease on the keyboard.

However, I did not observe that the physical aspects of getting words on paper deterred students from writing. When I volunteered to help one student type the paper he had already hand written, he declined saying he did not mind typing it himself. He also realized he needed to become more proficient with computer usage and appreciated the opportunity to practice even though he sometimes felt frustrated by the extra time involved. One student who was newly introduced to computers was assisted by a classmate, who showed her options and shortcuts. She actually became excited as she learned to cut and paste and soon became comfortable using the technology. These were positive experiences that helped students become better acquainted with each other and more proficient on computers.

The physical aspect that was most important to student writers was their personal style of writing. Some students were more comfortable composing first drafts on notebook paper because they felt hand writing was more personal than using a machine,

and this method helped them maintain better concentration. Some students preferred using pencil so they could erase and maintain a neater look to the page. Other students preferred using pen as they felt their writing was easier to read, and it was more permanent. After these students had totally written their essays on paper, they just transferred their words to a computer disk.

A second type of student took notes on ideas about the current essay. Sometimes an informal outline was written to organize the student's thoughts. Then the student composed on the computer using the notes as a guideline rather than staring at a blank screen.

A third type of student composed directly in front of the computer. These students had extensive computer experience and did not find the noise of equipment, movement of students walking to the printer, nearby discussion, or other distractions bothersome to concentration. They could type nearly as fast as thoughts came to them and easily move sections while composing. The connection they felt with computers was more than the cold machine described by students who preferred writing by hand. A computer was just another writing tool but more modern than paper and pencil.

Several students wrote that they became uncomfortable when "forced" to use "foreign" tools. A few people were beginning to move away from paper and pencil to computers as they became more familiar with the software, but others became anxious if their system was disrupted. "Then I get stiff, nervous, and not sure what I should be writing."

It appeared to me that part of an individual's style and process of writing includes the way he/she feels is most comfortable in moving words from inside the mind to outside the body. One student said the pencil was like an extension of his arm when writing, while other students found hand writing physically tiring. ("My fingers hurt!")

Writing isolation. Most of the students in the study initially viewed writing as an isolated skill that was performed in competition for grades. As the semester progressed, students in the study, similar to the findings of Louth et al. (1993), began to utilize and appreciate collaboration. They enjoyed themselves more, received more feedback and support, and learned from each other. Participants became comfortable discussing writing concerns, new topics, and writing ideas (Palmer et al., 1994). They developed a sense of enjoyment in sharing their writing instead of trying to hide their work. ("If one person read something funny everybody laughed so I think that's just having a little fun in class--and you have to have some of that to make it interesting.")

My analysis of participants in the study found writing isolation caused by more than the idea of writing alone or as competition for grades--it was tied to the culture of the class. Some students in the study felt isolated toward writing because they did not feel they fit into the environment of a general education class. They defined themselves as technical students who preferred hands-on activities. They did not envision themselves as a viable part of classes that were more academic in nature. One student wrote, "Honestly, I have not learned how to do anything as a writer in this class. My problem with not

showing up and not caring brings me to be average before your eyes." Another student wrote in his journal,

> General education is a waste of time in my book and I don't feel that I gain from any general education classes that I am having to take. I have only one electrical class this semester. That is dumb. I don't see the need to make us try and learn about something I do not want to. If I want to know English and writing I'll become an author.

Related to this idea is the misperception that readers would not enjoy reading about their experiences or topics of a technical nature. One student began to write an essay about building a shed. After he had written two pages where he described in detail how to place boards and pound nails, he came to me and said he was dissatisfied because his essay was boring. I couldn't disagree because the essay was also uninteresting to me as well as group members. The information he presented was common knowledge. However, that did not mean that his topic needed to be boring. We talked about his feelings of living on a farm and the wide range of knowledge needed by people who farm as a living. Carpentry skills were a small part of that knowledge.

This student felt isolated because he did not understand how to consider his audience and did not select a topic that was even interesting for him to discuss in writing. Using the context of the writing process he was able to move away from a narrow view of writing, select a topic of interest to him, and expand it to become more inclusive. As the student connected with his audience, he envisioned real people who would learn from him. His final essay described life on a farm and the many skills he developed to help the operation run smoothly--an interesting topic that helped dispel stereotypes of farmers.

Revision. My students initially viewed revision as a sentence-level activity (Polanski, 1985; Sullivan, 1986). According to one student, "To be an excellent writer means to be a decent proofreader." Revision for some students included minor mechanical changes. They did not understand the importance of audience consideration and were unable to see the dissonance in their writing (Knoblauch & Brannon, 1984) because as one student said, "I know what I want to say."

Peer editing and conferences soon led students to revision, a part of the process approach that recognizes errors as part of learning (Applebee, 1991). Students were given instruction and suggestions that would help them correct errors and develop their writing assignments before grading, lowering the risk of a sense of failure. As they worked in groups and realized that other students depended on their input and appreciated their writing, students were more apt to take responsibility for their work instead of depending on me as the teacher and authority figure as discussed by Meikle (1982). Reduced passivity (Metzer & Bryant, 1993) was evidenced by students' more willing participation in classroom activities. They began to value peers' suggestions. As one student wrote,

> It is very important to listen to the input from the rest of the class to look into their insight on various strategies. Between the teacher and the students together many things get accomplished in one hour so it just isn't smart to not listen even for a short amount of time. Everybody has their own way of thinking and by listening closely it is easier to tell which would best help your own writing habits.

Although I agree that students often view revision solely as changing a few commas, data from this study show that problems go deeper. Students did not revise

because they did not care about the topic, did not view themselves as master students, had not developed a sense of voice, or just did the minimum to get by. Some of the students saw their assignments as good enough. One student admitted, "I could do a lot better if I really applied myself but I normally do just enough work to get by." Another student disclosed,

> Today I have been slacking off because I took a test in AC theory and think I should be taking it easy the rest of the day. My mental behavior has been at a low for the educational part. I didn't do well in class discussion today, but I just told myself to just use common sense.

Several students indicated they had never written an essay of more than one page during their high school education. They were therefore inexperienced in writing and revising their writing. Course requirements caused concern for some students as disclosed by the following individual. "When I found out that we would be writing four major papers and that those four papers would be a major part of our grade, this was a big tension. I had never written papers that long before."

The biggest challenge for me was to lead students to a change of perception so they would view their final product with pride. The way students viewed their school work often reflected their views about themselves. Students who were not confident with their skills in general had difficulty making eye contact or speaking in discussion. These same students were fearful about revision because it meant having to work closely with me and classmates and take more responsibility for themselves. I stressed the problems of connecting one's name with products that were faulty or inaccurate, and the negative image reflected on the individual.

I honestly felt that some students did not have the slightest clue how to revise. It took strong leadership and direct instruction to show them exactly what to do. Although this approach helped most students improve their writing quickly, it also left them feeling dependent on me to solve their grammatical and mechanical problems for them. Often students brought me documents they wrote for purposes outside the class and asked, "Would you proofread this for me?"

As students began to revise following suggestions from me and group members, however, they began to notice how their essays strengthened. Many students made amazing strides from the first draft to the final product. One student noted,

> Revision is one of the most creative stages of writing. A writer begins the revision process the moment he or she begins writing, and doesn't stop until the final copy is complete. Revising allows the paper to become neater and more "audience friendly." Through revision an author will not only refine words and correct grammatical mistakes, he or she will also develop the entire structure of the paper.

Conferences were an important part of the revision process for students in the study because they helped me teach students how to revise. The biggest impact in change was due to the individual nature of the conference as we looked directly as a student's own work instead of samples from a textbook. During conferences, I used question/answer techniques to help students come to their own conclusions about possible changes, gave reasons for grammatical rules, and real aloud parts of the writing with emphasis so dissidence could be heard. The biggest challenge was for students to internalize the revision process so they could do it without my help. As one student

admitted, "Amazingly I found that the technique you mentioned really does work." Another student expressed her learning as follows.

> Writing a paper is a very different situation to me now because I have learned to think of writing as being fun and a learning experience instead of something that I have to do. I enjoyed writing each paper because I didn't know that I had it in me to write as well and accurately as I do.

Evaluation and assessment. Evaluation was initially perceived as being directed solely from the teacher to the student (Hurlow, 1993), and students were not used to evaluating their own skills or their peers' progress. Students could often list their weaknesses in writing but not their strengths. "I don't think I have many strengths in writing. One of my downfalls is my spelling. I sometimes don't know where to begin. I don't apply much creativity to my writing. Topic selection is hard for me."

Some students were hesitant to work in peer editing groups, at first believing their purpose was to locate errors. ("I had to peer edit my partner's paper to make sure that her grammar and punctuation was correct.") The complaint was made that, "I can not find someone else's errors if I can't find my own."

After students had the opportunity to use journals for self-reflection, learned how to work more effectively in peer editing groups, and read my words of praise on completed drafts, they began to view evaluation with a different perspective. As Fagan (1989) discovered, students began to experiment with language more when they realized there was time for revision, and they were not penalized for incorrect grammatical structures during first drafts. Also, each student and I had a conference before the final draft was due in order to evaluate each assignment together. The aspects of too much

negative criticism and misunderstandings at grading time as discussed by Sullivan (1986) were avoided since discussion and suggestions were provided before each paper was due.

Using peer editing groups as initial evaluators caused students to feel less anxious (Hamp-Lyons, 1994). "It was Wednesday and there were three of us. Our peer editing was casual and informal. I read my piece aloud and they read theirs. We gave each other helpful hints, and overall I think that was the best group I have been a part of. We got a lot done and it made my piece better."

In addition, grammatical tests were never used to assess students in accordance with O'Brien's (1992) findings that they only measure solitary tasks instead of students' real understanding of writing. Students were evaluated on their own progress and given time and assistance during revision.

Students' initial perception of evaluation was that it was intended to locate mistakes and judge students' views. ("My partner says I ask a lot of stupid questions.") The literature seems to ignore how students who move from one class to another daily feel about what they perceive as constant judgment.

Although students initially complained about writing in journals, and some of them produced minimal entries, other students grew to understand themselves better as they evaluated their own skills in a personal format. After exploring in his journal a definition of himself as a writer, one student wrote, "The most recent thing I have done as a writer is every time I write I feel like I've learned something new."

Without the use of journals, I believe students would not have begun to evaluate themselves or explore themselves as writers in depth. As they understood themselves as students and their attitudes about writing, they were better able to evaluate their classmates during peer editing. During conferences when I asked students how they felt about their essays, they were able to provide honest critiques instead of saying, "It's good enough for me."

Grammar emphasis. Students in the study were confused by conflicting teaching methods and perceptions of what constitutes effective writing (Meikle, 1982). ("Quality in writing for me stands for using correct punctuation and capitalization.") How they were taught to write in the past did not always match the current type of instruction. Participants who were too shy to ask questions faced even greater confusion. In particular, students who often completed worksheets in their high school English classes instead of writing essays or more meaningful pieces described writing as "boring."

As researched by Janet Emig (1978), when the mechanics of writing were presented as "the basics," writing became nothing more than a mechanical act, and students had difficulty communicating. One student described a lecture about grammar as follows, "During most of class I only half-listened. I spent most of the time thinking about other things. I am only a good listener when I'm interested in the topic."

As students wrote about topics of importance to them (such as hearing the Pope speak, family relationships, hobbies, career goals, and past problems) and realized their peers were interested in their experiences and opinions, students' views about writing

changed. One student in particular verbalized that she finally understood that writing is a recursive process, and people possess individual approaches. Students developed a stronger sense of their own voices as audience awareness increased.

One student stated, "Writing is a way in which I can express the way I feel. I need to consider the audience I am writing for and the tone I want to use. I can express my point of view, trying not to show only one side."

A disturbing aspect of the literature review was to discover that although much has been written warning about overemphasis in grammar used in the traditional approach, a majority of the students in my study came from high school backgrounds where they did not complete lengthy writings and used grammatical worksheets. My study concurs with the 1992 NAEP study (Applebee et al., 1994) which discovered many students in public schools throughout the United States were not required to complete writing projects that included sustained involvement. In addition, time devoted to writing at the high school level was stated as minimal by the participants in my study. One student wrote in his journal,

> I like what we are doing in College Comp. I think everything I am taught I am going to need in the future. I am glad we aren't doing spelling words. Not so much that the words are hard, or spelling is hard, but it is a useless thing to learn. I can spell close enough to have the computer give me the correct spelling if I need it. In my high school class the teacher considered us idiots if we didn't understand what he was teaching like diagramming sentences.

Another problem I discovered was there appears to be a fine line between grammar emphasis and grammar instruction. Most of my students entered the beginning composition class with very poor grammar skills. I needed to spend time assisting

students in improving these weaknesses. As future business people and health care professionals, my students needed to write documents appropriate for their professions and could not afford to continue sloppy and incorrect writing. They also needed to understand the main importance of the message and how to vary style depending on purpose and audience. Separating these two issues was at first confusing to students whose main goal in writing was to fulfill class requirements. ("I just did it for the grade.")

Learning environment. The classroom environment was another important area addressed in this study. Some students were concerned that writing was not a hands-on activity and not relevant to their intended careers. ("This class could be the last time for writing for the rest of our lives.") These concerns were also described by Manning and Baruth (1995) in their discussion of problem learning environments, the consequences of not accommodating different learning styles.

As Williams and Alden (1983) wrote, classrooms structured with meaningless tasks or manual work rather than critical thinking provide students with little motivation to improve their writing skills. Students in the study became more animated when working on particular activities that were meaningful to them; for instance, when they were asked to write letters to each other. As they saw their peers' interest in their writing, students were more encouraged and saw value in writing success (Williams & Alden, 1983).

Rather than seeing the teacher as the sole audience, students in the study realized the fuller ranges of readership (Hamp-Lyons, 1994). As one student related, "There were many projects designed to expand students' minds to ideas involved in the writing process and thinking of other readers. Using a peer editing group where two heads are better than one can help a writer get a feel for what his audience would think."

Student/teacher conferences initially caused stress for some students, which was evidenced by their body language and comments like, "Be easy with me." A few students were used to the teacher controlling the conference without teaching students to use editing skills themselves (Taylor, 1993), and most students had never had a writing conference with a teacher before. One student stated, "In high school none of the teachers really explained the writing process to us. They basically told us about the thesis statement and the rest we made up as we went along. We wrote one draft and turned it in for a grade."

These students had been taught with the traditional approach to writing. The structure of language was introduced as the most important aspect of writing. Students did not have the opportunity to complete sustained writing or work individually with instructors as is common in the process approach.

After students came to know me better and realized the benefits of individual conferences, many people asked to conference more than the one required time. They began to ask more questions about grammatical elements and pointed to specific problems in their writing. One student described conferences the following way.

> A successful conference is not one-sided; it is an open exchange of ideas between student and instructor. This is a great way to get to know your teacher better and get one-on-one help. It helps students to learn from their mistakes because our teacher has us look up our mistakes and write why we make them and how we will keep from making the same mistake. That is a great learning experience.

When I think about the learning environment, I consider how I want to be treated as a student and employee myself. I remember a high school class where I was placed in the last row because I was quiet and did not make trouble. I could not see the blackboard and could seldom hear the teacher completely. I felt as if I were invisible.

I remember a doctoral class where the teacher started late each session because she had not prepared for the class earlier. She put down students' ideas, deferred to students in the class who were administrators instead of teachers, and temporarily failed several students because she did not have time to review their assignments and return them for revision. One adult woman cried in the class, and a male student pounded his fist on the table in frustration. By the end of the semester I finally tuned out the teacher and scribbled notes to my classmate. I felt the teacher did not care about my progress and was more interested in her own research than assisting students.

At the college where I am employed the faculty in our department make a point to greet each other, ask about family concerns, and assist each other whenever possible. The personal connection among us makes our department more cohesive and the environment less stressful.

I want my students to feel safe and comfortable in my classes. A problem I see in the literature is that students are not often asked how they feel about their classes until the

end-of-the-course evaluation. Teachers might feel intimidated by knowing students' true feelings. I understand this feeling, especially since several of the students in the study resented the composition requirement. ("I'm not going to make any money from this class.") Some students initially treated me with animosity, and their body language the first day of class indicated their discomfort or anger. My feelings would most likely have been hurt if I would have heard their opinions about me during the first week of class.

However, I did want to know about students' attitudes about the course. The student information sheet completed the first day of class asked about their comfort level in certain aspects of the writing process, without questioning their feelings about instruction at this point. Body language gave me clues as to their comfort in the class environment.

As I tried to structure the class environment to fit the make-up and needs of the students, and their attitudes became more positive, I asked specific questions about their likes and dislikes about the current class and past educational experiences. During one conference I told a student I observed his discomfort and asked how I could make the class easier for him. Knowing one student had difficulties relating with staff in high school, I patted his back when he sat next to me during conferences to personalize our relationship.

Although the literature explains certain types of problem learning environments and provides suggestions for improving classrooms, particularly at elementary levels, an area that needs more attention is the community college and how literacy is shaped by

social interactions of this population. Our students span several ages. Many people have children of their own and problems that differ from students at the secondary level, including financial concerns. In addition, many of our students have felt unsuccessful at secondary levels. ("I didn't take any steps to improve my writing because it was too hard for me to do.")

One student wrote about his high school English class as follows. "When I wrote I tried not to get deep into my own personal beliefs. I felt if other people knew then I would be vulnerable to attack." Questions should be devised to discover what types of learning environments work the best for particular students at the community college level and how to help these people become successful students more quickly.

Writer's block. Selecting a writing topic was generally not a problem for students in the study who used the creating techniques discussed in class and peer groups to help generate and expand ideas. First writings in journals indicated that some students wrongly believed they had nothing of importance to impart, but positive feedback from peers and me allowed such fears to quickly dispel.

Writer's block in the literature refers to problems in generating words on paper (Rose, 1980) and difficulty writing in "fluent, timely fashion" (Boice, 1993, p. 19). Although my students who did not use prewriting and creating techniques complained about having nothing to write about at the beginning of the semester, their later experiences implied an expanded definition of writer's block.

Although many students quickly thought of an appropriate writing topic, they often faced difficulty deciding how to expand that topic to present a complete idea or full story. ("I can't think of anything that I could do differently.") One main reason related to audience consideration. Students had not before considered that their writing should be directed to a certain type of person or group instead of writing solely for teacher approval. Other students felt after writing one draft their document was finished, and due to such self-talk limited themselves during the revision process. One student wrote in his journal, "My standards for quality in my writing aren't very high. Since it's my writing, other people really shouldn't have a say in it."

Writer's block therefore related to the revision as well as the creating stages of writing. Students with little experience with elements of the process approach or negative attitudes regarding writing sometimes produced negative self-talk which prevented them from opening their minds to the full span of writing activities that could be used to fully develop a document. An example of such negative self-talk was, "Writing should be done in enjoyment, not something that should be forced at you."

Confines of writing. As Langer and Applebee (1987) discussed, teaching and promoting writing in many institutions is viewed as the sole job of the English teacher. Several students in the study also viewed writing as a skill isolated in the English classroom and not applicable to other situations. ("After having thirteen years of English in elementary and high school, the student must have to suffer again in college. They never chose English as a major so why do they need more.")

Support from technical instructors by requiring writing and discussing the relevancy of general education classes helped improve students' attitudes and allowed them to more easily transfer their knowledge. Members of one group in the study discussed using the writing process professionally when "writing to a customer about what is wrong with their furnace" and "in all ways as a manager of a business."

Due to the stereotype that writing is only completed in the English classroom, several students had taken on a similar attitude. However, since many teachers of all subjects at our community college value writing and require writing in their classes, students began to change their perceptions. ("Taking time to write and repetition in all my classes will help me better myself in the writing process.") Team teaching activities would most likely strengthen students' attitudes even further.

Teacher preparation. Teacher preparation as applied to this study involves two areas: my feelings about the inservice preparation I received and my students perceptions regarding teacher preparation.

During my baccalaureate training, I was unaware of community colleges and their mission, and the words process writing were not brought to my attention. My English classes were geared toward literature, and I was only required to take one class in expository writing. This class helped students improve their writing but did not instruct us how to teach others writing. When I began teaching high school students in the mid-1970s I had to figure out for myself how to best teach writing. I had no training

whatsoever to prepare me for the particular problems of students at the community college level when I switched places of employment.

Students in the current study had not considered teacher training. They indicated that it was the teacher's job to make assignments, run class meetings, and make decisions. The literature is lax in describing the type training students feel should be provided for inservice teachers and does not address student perception of the value of the education completed by their teachers or suggestions for further training.

Materials. Although two textbooks, a handbook and reader, were required for students in the beginning composition class, we did not use the entire books. The handbook was used more as a reference to allow students to take responsibility for locating information to help them make grammatical and mechanical decisions. The reader provided professional sample essays that students could use as models.

I preferred to use overheads I developed myself for mini-lessons. I felt they let me be more flexible. I could easily flip through my stack of overheads and provide a mini-lesson on any area my students faced difficulty at the time. While the same information was included in the handbook, the overheads used more relevant examples, were shorter, and were geared toward group discussion rather than individual writing exercises. Most students appeared to appreciate the mini-lessons as indicated by the following comment, "The overhead material was really helpful to me. You reviewed everything for us. There were a lot of things I had forgotten. It really helped for you to talk about writing because it brought to my attention the things I needed to work on."

Summary. Students' perceptions about writing were influenced in a variety of ways. Influences included physical causes, writing isolation, revision, evaluation and assessment, grammar emphasis, learning environment, writer's block, confines of writing, teacher preparation, and materials. Although the literature describes each of these areas, the current study extended discussion by viewing each influence from students' perspective.

Nontraditional Learners

The literature about community college students describes particular types of students who often attend this type of institution. The students participating in this study were a younger group than the median age. During a member check when I asked a technical instructor to review my perceptions and findings, he related that several of the class problems were related to the immaturity of the students.

As described by Needham (1994), several students in the study who did not complete the course had not selected a major and were uncertain about career goals. It was therefore difficult for them to relate the writing course with current or future goals. Some of the technical students were used to emphasis placed on physical skills from their vocational classes in high school and initially faced difficulty in a different type of learning environment as related by McGrath and Spear (1991).

Although the literature describes certain types of community college students--older students undergoing career changes (Dobie, 1992), adult women with family pressures (Morrison, 1994), and vocational-oriented students (Barrett & Wootten, 1994)--

description of this unique population is not complicated enough. Students are complex and difficult to label. They might have a mixture of problems, and one student can not necessarily be compared with another.

Using the students in this study as an example, a person may not have attitudes or perceptions that are initially apparent. The electrician students in my class all sat in the back row the first day of class--many with baseball caps pulled over eyes and body language that portrayed discomfort. However, I soon recognized that the discomfort of one student was not due to fears about writing or classroom activity, but how he would continue to be accepted by his peers if he disclosed that he was interested in the class and liked to write. While a few other electrician students complained about having to take the class, this student was silent. Through his journal I learned that he wanted to improve his writing and was willing to work hard. He was hesitant to volunteer during discussion and let peers know his real feelings until he realized they would not make fun of him.

Viewing nontraditional learners at the community college level is important because they make up a specialized population that is quite diverse. In addition, labeling students by age, gender, or career interest is not productive because students within each category possess different backgrounds, interests, experiences, and goals. An individual approach and direct questioning of students' perceptions is advisable in order to best understand students.

Classroom Culture and Communication

Viewing the classroom culture and how participants related with each other was an important part of this study. I believe that teaching and learning can not be studied apart from the context of the classroom where people relate with each other during the learning process. Students came from different home backgrounds, possessed varied career aspirations, and had different interests. Yet they were thrown together in a classroom setting where they needed to relate to each other using conventions expected in a college setting (Heron, 1982).

Similar to Goodenough's (1981) comments, my students had to become competent in relation to the group in order to fit into the classroom environment. Peer editing groups fostered this competence and helped students become more comfortable with each other as they learned expectations of their peers as well as me as their teacher. One student wrote,

> Right now I'm happy with college and I'm excited to come to class every day. I'm starting to learn more about my teacher and what she expects of me. Up until now, I didn't really know too many of my classmates. Lately I've been talking to more classmates and found out that they are quite friendly. Getting along with classmates makes the whole day, perhaps the whole week, better.

It was interesting to note that some students asked not to be paired with an individual who had poor attendance and feelings of apathy. Comments included, "I don't want to be stuck with someone who just sits around and does nothing." "Why was I in class? He didn't bother." "I don't wish to be grouped with him again. I don't believe he

takes this class seriously. I feel he does what's required of him and nothing more. I want someone who is actually going to care what I've written."

Students in the study initially viewed me as the teacher as having complete control of not only the class but also their writing topics (Meikle, 1982). Questions like, "What should I do next?" and "What do you want me to write about?" evidenced students' lack of empowerment. They did not at first view me as a leader but more as a person to impose my own ideas on them (Fagan, 1989). As one student stated, "The teacher decides what is important."

Although student communication with me during class discussion was initially minimal because students were hesitant to give their opinions orally, journals were effectively used to express their feelings. The journals helped me accommodate student needs and keep the classroom more student-centered because I better realized the challenges faced by each student (Applebee, 1991).

As the semester progressed the class became more socially organized as students began to create new relationships and define themselves in this particular classroom (Carbaugh, 1994). Based on models of the past and present (Bloome, 1991), students learned how they could best fit into the classroom environment and the behavior and expectations that were acceptable to this particular setting. One young woman stated,

> I am learning now in college to do what's required and help others. I myself am accountable for knowing what is going on in class. To succeed in an academic environment, I work hard, study a lot of hours after school, and work at a job.

Some students who had difficult high school experiences changed their behavior and their appearance to look and act like their image of a successful student. For example, one student began to model his organization practices to mine. Another student began to accept his peers' enthusiasm for expressing views in writing. They actually became enculturated as students.

Viewing the classroom culture, two particular aspects evolved: communication among classmates and the way I as the teacher directed activities and related with students. These two aspects were interrelated since I was in a position to promote specific ways students communicated. Social organization of the classroom was established as participants communicated, establishing and creating relationships, positioning themselves socially, defining roles, creating identity, and ordering social life. An example from a participant in this study is used to illustrate this point.

One of the electrician students was lukewarm about the composition requirement, but attended regularly at the beginning of the semester and put effort into his assignments. He was well liked by other students and appeared to adjust quickly to the environment of this particular group.

Then his attendance began to slacken. He missed two Fridays, then did not attend for two weeks. In his journal he stated his only interests were drinking, smoking, and working. He also added, "My study habits are pitiful and useless. Why are they useless you may ask? Because I don't have any." The other students told me he was "around,"

just not attending any of his classes. They implied he was spending most of his time "partying."

My thoughts were, "I can't lose another one!" Of the nineteen students enrolled, two had transferred to another section, one had switched from credit to audit status, and four had dropped the course or stopped attending.

I tried calling the current non-attending student at home, but someone else was living at the number he provided. In the meantime, his classmates were trying to encourage him. He was not attending his electrical courses, and his program instructor was also trying to encourage him.

One day the student returned. He never asked about assignments or even said hello to me. He just sat in the back of the room looking embarrassed. I had the rest of the class begin writing in their journals so I could meet privately with the electrician student in my office. I said it would be a waste of his time and money to fail the class near the end of the semester, and it was too late to drop the course. Based on his past performance, I had confidence he could do well.

The student related that he really did not want to attend college; he just wanted a job. Over the past couple of weeks he had realized that "partying" wasn't getting him anywhere, and he tired of those activities. He had decided to finish the semester and take a job the following semester. I agreed he had made a wise choice because he might appreciate the credits later, and he would feel good about himself for finishing what he

had started. I also added, "Besides, I want to see your face every day!" He smiled and assured me he wanted to pass.

Before the next class session I saw him in the hall on the way to class. I threw up my arms and joked, "It's Friday! And you're here!" I was pleasantly surprised when he reached to give me a little hug.

When he entered the classroom, other students teased him in a friendly manner. They were also relieved to see him return. Comments such as, "You're here?" were students' way of welcoming him back. The student was obviously pleased with the attention. He grinned the whole hour and laughed aloud when a classmate slapped him on the back.

This situation reminded me of the prodigal son story. The student returned to the fold, I gave him extra time to complete his missed assignments, and the whole class welcomed him. He was able to pull himself back into the educational arena because of the support of his peers. At the beginning of the semester he aligned his identity with other electrical students who began to question the relevancy of all their general education classes as well as the composition class. He seemed to enjoy the social aspects of the class, and recognized his writing skills were improving. Although other forces temporarily drew him away from our class, when he came to the conclusion that he had lost footing, he easily repositioned himself in our group and successfully completed the course.

Communication and emphasis on classroom culture were important aspects in the composition class used for this study. As stated in the literature, a sense of belonging occurred when students met class expectations and developed competence within the group. Developing student/teacher and student/student relationships was necessary for shared understanding, trust, and respect.

Teacher as Researcher

The literature names several benefits of using the teacher as research approach: to create a stronger educational institution (McNiff et al., 1996), transform teaching (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990), become change agents (Braithwaite, 1995), and better understand student learning (Patterson & Shannon, 1993). Connected to the literature are my personal outcomes in using this approach.

A main advantage of being teacher as researcher was that my students took the study as a natural course of events in the class. Every student signed the participant release form. Students in this group did not act any differently from classes in the past. Therefore, I felt I was able to realistically study these participants.

A second advantage was the opportunity to look more closely at my practices. As I wrote in my journal daily, took field notes, transcribed classroom discussions, and reviewed students' journals and other writings in a formal manner, I was able to analyze my teaching in a different manner. I was better able to understand how students perceived me personally and as a teacher, writing in general, and the composition class. Using member checks gave me insights from the perspective of other faculty. Since the

research was constant throughout the semester, I became more reflective and learned more about myself. As I tried various researching strategies, I made decisions about how I might vary the process during my next study, analyzing which aspects worked best for me and the students, the type of environment involved, and the information I was seeking.

Being able to view my practices in this manner is particularly helpful as a community college instructor. The stereotype of community colleges is that they are less rigorous than a four-year college and that staff is not as well prepared. Continued use of researching my practices will help promote a more professional image to the public and personnel in four-year institutions of myself as a community college instructor who focuses on the learners yet continues to research to discover best practice.

A third advantage of the teacher as researcher approach was how it extended my contact with students inside and outside the class. Students reflected in their journals, discussing aspects about themselves as writers and learners that were fairly personal. For example, one young man wrote a poem he intended to give to his girlfriend, stating he had never before felt confident enough to write poetry. He wrote that if I ever told anyone he would never talk to me again!

Throughout the process students learned how to better research themselves. We learned about each other collaboratively. I felt it was an honest way to discover information--not narrow like using one measurement tool. Because I viewed students holistically, I learned more about the many aspects that mold a complex individual.

In addition to other data, I discovered much about students' feelings about the process approach to writing. Although not all participants in the study completed the course, the students who remained strongly praised specific elements of the process approach and acknowledged ways their writing strengthened throughout the semester. ("I've learned that you have to be a thinker if you want to be a writer and a student.") Students completing the course who were negative about writing in general or the course requirement at the beginning of the semester left the class with greater understanding and appreciation of writing. The following quote was written collaboratively by three students.

> There are many lessons that you will learn in college that will help you in the future, but probably the most important is writing. There will be many times in the future when good writing skills will be needed to show what you have accomplished, and what you want to accomplish for your boss or customer. If the paper is written poorly, it will reflect back on you and your job performance no matter how good you or your work has been. Learning to be a good writer is a goal worth striving for. Writing is fundamental to learning. When students have learned to write better, they have learned to think better. Writing is best thought of as a process. No textbook can ever replace the pupil's composing their own feelings, thoughts, and experiences.

As discussed by Emig (1971) and Flower and Hayes (1981), a strength of the process approach is that emphasis is placed on each individual student and his/her special process. Journals used by students in this study helped them assess their own attitudes and skills and present a log of changes throughout the semester. Several students said they learned much about themselves through the journaling process and would keep their journals for future reference.

One student described the benefits of a journal in the following manner. "Keeping a journal helped me realize how much my writing skills have improved since the beginning of the year just by looking back to the first couple entries. We reached deeper and actually used our heads." Another student disclosed,

> Writing in this journal has given me some ideas for topics. I have been exploring things I have never really talked, heard, or written about before. It helped me relieve some stress. I did not have to write to please somebody else.

Conferences helped me work individually with students to identify their common errors and areas of strength. Critiquing their own writing instead of solely using textbook examples was more meaningful to students because instruction was directly applicable.

As Donald Graves (1983) has written, any student can write if given enough time and freedom of topic. Although some students in the study had difficulty with grammatical elements, their first drafts contained information of importance to them, elements of creativity, and stories worth telling. Students who used the process to the fullest were able to develop first drafts into final products of high quality writing that were interesting to the readers and satisfying to the writers. ("The standards set for myself for writing have become very high. I want to write the best information I can. I now know I can write.") More confidence developed as the following student recorded.

> As College Composition is slowly coming to an end, I feel much more confident in writing as I now understand the writing process that experienced writers have used to produce written works. The steps have opened the doors for me to clearly express my thoughts.

The social element of the process approach was another area praised by students in the study remaining at the end of the semester. Writing and social activity were mixed as students worked in small groups to complete projects and peer edit documents. As Elbow (1991) discovered, students became more aware of their audience and received support from classmates when using a peer process. Our classroom developed a better sense of community as we engaged in shared language about writing and worked together toward similar goals as discussed by Calkins (1983). ("Peer editing was rewarding in the sense that I got to read what other people wrote. I found it enjoyable.")

The literature described several advantages of using the teacher as researcher approach: to create a strong institution, transform teacher practices, and better understand students. Although it was interesting for me to read about other teachers' research in their own classrooms, applying that knowledge to my own class became personally meaningful. Research became a natural part of the class for the students and me. I was able to look more closely at my practices as a teacher due to the intense reflection involved. Most importantly, because I viewed my students in more detail and we collaborated on research as well as class activities, contact between the students and me was extended and positive relationships developed.

Implications

Three main implications will be discussed in this section. Although positive outcomes were discovered with the students who completed the beginning composition

class, there are three areas that could be extended in the future. They include implications for students, implications for instructors, and implications for teacher as researcher.

Implications for Students

My biggest disappointment during the study involved student attrition. Of the 19 students enrolled at the beginning of the semester, only 12 completed the course. Three students in each of the other two sections of the beginning composition course I taught withdrew, which was typical of past semesters. The class studied was an unusual group. Factors which added to attrition for this group might have been the general make-up of the group (younger and less mature than usual groups) and the late time of day (student attendance especially dropped on Fridays as many students left town on the weekends).

Strategies that worked well with many students did not engage everyone, and I was unable to mediate with several students into attending class each day and completing their assignments. I tried to provide opportunities to raise questions for students to reflect in order to assist them in becoming aware of their perceptions and motivating themselves. However, some students did not develop an interest in self-reflection. Although a few students who withdrew from the class talked positively about writing during the beginning of the semester, they did not produce work that proved their interest. Journal entries were minimal, essays were underdeveloped and full of errors, and other work was incomplete.

The students who did not complete the composition course either dropped out of college completely or did not finish their other courses in addition to mine during the

semester. Therefore, I surmise that their main difficulties were due to personal problems rather than writing concerns. As one student disclosed, "The reason for me not performing well in my academic environment was that of the many problems I face outside the classroom. The problems demand more attention than the classes."

Future studies might concentrate on students who did not complete the course to view their perceptions as to why they were not successful. It would also be interesting to explore whether these students return to college later, if they experience success or failure the next time they enroll, and their personal compared with academic use of writing.

Implications for Teachers

Although the 12 participants in the study who completed the semester successfully displayed more confidence in their writing abilities, indicated they felt more positive about writing, and believed their skills had improved, it would be valuable to follow students as they continue their education through our institution to observe whether they continue using the writing strategies practiced in class.

A technical instructor used as a member check throughout the study said he could tell which students were enrolled in or had completed the composition course because their writing was more mature and contained fewer errors than other students. However, viewing continued writing from students' perspectives would be valuable. Developing team teaching opportunities between writing and technical faculty would expand knowledge of students' use of writing in several subject areas and extend cooperation among teachers.

Assignments and classroom activities might be restructured to help students better understand near the beginning of the course the types of writing required of them in chosen professions. Outside speakers from business and industry might be invited to discuss the types of writing they complete on the job and the importance of professional writing skills. More discussion and practice in writing technical documents might take pressure off students who feel that real writing is only applied to novelists.

Another implication would be to review the curriculum of the beginning composition course to decide how a teacher could restructure a course based on the knowledge generated by this study. In particular it would be valuable to review the process approach and areas that enhance or cause confusion for students at the beginning level. Comparing students' perceptions about the teaching approach in a beginning writing course with their perceptions in an advanced course would allow teachers to better understand how students view the curriculum as they move through different courses.

It would also be interesting to compare the perceptions of students at the community college where I teach with students from other community colleges within and outside our state to look for commonalties and differences among students in varied institutions. My study involved just one classroom at one college. Other classrooms and colleges have more information to contribute.

Teachers from subject areas other than writing could also benefit from and extend the current study. Student perceptions are not just tied to a composition course. Student

perceptions among various subject areas would provide insight into how people view themselves in an educational setting as well as their beliefs about different academic and technical classes.

Implications for Teacher as Researcher

Using a formal teacher as researcher approach was valuable in gaining detailed information about students' perceptions as well as reflection into my own practices. The current study viewed one classroom. It would be interesting to use the same approach to study sections of the beginning composition course taught by various instructors to examine different teaching and learning techniques as well as classroom and college-wide culture.

Viewing participants as unique individuals instead of typical students provided much insight. Every student made important contributions to the study. A teacher as researcher approach could be continued to observe aspects of students that make them atypical instead of trying to study an "average" student to draw conclusions to a general population.

Researching in teams would help our institution more thoroughly assess ourselves. Problems regarding attrition, negative attitudes toward writing or other subjects, and communication breakdown could be studied in depth by seeking students' perceptions instead of relying solely on information generated by college personnel or the use of surveys.

Teacher as researcher strategies could be extended to assist students in researching themselves. As I continue researching my own classes and work collaboratively with my students, I need to discover how to further empower them to help me make decisions involving the classroom environment and ways to improve instruction and learning.

This approach could also be used to discover how students survive in a classroom. It would be valuable to study in further detail how students change their behaviors, habits, and beliefs in order to take full membership in a classroom setting. Possibly there are students who only play a role without feeling true ownership in a class as well as people who do not survive due to the inability to accept the classroom culture.

During the research study, I discovered information using a continual process that extended throughout the entire semester. I had the opportunity to adapt aspects of my study as necessary. Since I was the teacher as well as the researcher, I possessed knowledge about each step in the class process and could use my in-depth data to learn why particular outcomes were reached. Instead of simply viewing raw data, I was provided with a richer context. Since I do not have to rely on outside researchers, I can easily expand what I have learned by extended research in future classes.

Conclusion

This study investigated community college students' and their teacher's perceptions about writing in a beginning composition course. It was designed to discover consequences that arise from various views about writing and how to resolve these views

through ethnographic measures. More importantly, this study assisted me personally and professionally in two main ways.

First, I discovered more about my own practices and my students' perceptions. I discovered that personal writing style connects with comfort in writing, the feeling of writing isolation or comfort is tied to the classroom culture, and hesitancy to revise can be tied to self-concept, sense of voice, topic selection, and inexperience. Students may fear evaluation and assessment because they view it as constant judgment and have not learned how to evaluate themselves. In the past, many of my students had minimal writing requirements, and their opinions about the learning environment were seldom solicited. I learned that the nontraditional learners at the community college level are a unique, complicated group who need to build communication with their peers and instructors in a positive, caring classroom culture.

Second, I extended my professionalism as a teacher and researcher. As a teacher and researcher I came to realize how I could use research to create a stronger institution as well as classroom, better understand my students, and look more closely at my own practice. Research became a natural part of the class, and my contact with students was extended as we learned from each other. I not only learned how to utilize research techniques, but also discovered more about myself as I researched the class in a formal manner.

I love teaching community college students. Each morning I look forward to going to my college, even though I realize the challenges involved. Although it is

frustrating when my students do not want to be in my class and are resistant to my efforts to lead them in new directions, I feel quite satisfied when I am able to help people. I enjoy watching their writing progress and observing their confidence rise.

I am fond of my colleagues and learn much from them. They are always available to collaborate to try new ideas or assist students. They are intelligent, caring individuals who actively smile and greet each other. I know that if I have a question on any topic, I can find an expert at our institution who is willing to provide answers.

What was missing in my work environment was deep understanding about why my students felt successful or not in my beginning composition class. I wanted to see the class through their eyes instead of my own. In order to accomplish that goal, I felt I needed to become expert at researching them in a way comfortable to me and acceptable to them. I not only wanted to learn what other teachers were doing, but to discover what more I could do to assist my students.

Through my study I learned about some of my own practices. I set particular patterns in a class that are comfortable for me that I try to also make comfortable to my students. I ask many probing questions to help students deeply consider feelings about themselves as learners, teachers, and writers. This study helped me discover how to become more reflective about my motives, goals, and objectives. I was reminded about the importance of viewing students holistically, constantly reminding them of their strengths, and working collaboratively with students instead of taking complete charge of the class.

I have considered ways I could encourage and instruct my colleagues to research with me. We have worked on teams for a variety of projects so a joint teacher as researcher study would be a natural extension.

As a result of this study, I will try using some of the resolution activities earlier in the semester to help students become more comfortable sooner and possibly avoid some conflicts. Also, I realize I need to view the classroom culture in more depth to discover how I could further enhance communication and the environment to assist poor attending and low motivated students.

Instructors at community colleges are sometimes treated like second-rate teachers by four-year colleges and universities. Community colleges in our state receive less funding and faculty earn smaller salaries than our university counterparts. I was once introduced by an English professor at a local four-year college as "a person who teaches at a little community college down the road."

I want to be treated as a professional, not only for myself but also for the benefit of our students. They also have been told that community colleges are not as "good" as four-year colleges. Some of our students have been told by high school counselors that they could never be successful in college. Others have failed courses in four-year colleges because classes were too large, or they did not have necessary support.

Some of our students may have lower placement scores and economic levels than their four-year counterparts. That does not mean they cannot learn or become just as

successful as B.A. students. Instead, they may need extra attention and alternative instruction. Community colleges can provide these special services and individualism.

Extending my professionalism by using a teacher as researcher approach has provided benefits to the students and me as the teacher. Together we can share with others the perceptions of this specialized group of teachers and learners to increase understanding. We can become closer to each other and work collaboratively to raise our status in society. As we reflect on our own practices, we can learn more about ourselves, our ideas, and our goals.

I believe the results of this study contribute to the broader body of knowledge by focusing on the perceptions of students at the community college level. This is a worthy group to study and promote. The categories generated and the student responses should prove valuable to parents and spouses, university professors, high school teachers, administrators, community college instructors, and community college students in better understanding the perceptions of this population and considering how teaching and learning might become enhanced by listening to student voices. Focusing on community college students will bring attention to these individuals, hopefully encourage others to join our institutions, and help the public and teachers at all levels to understand the complex issues involved in our educational pursuits.

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APPENDIX

Coding and Category Development

Figure A3. Sample student journal entry.

(Category 7) In the past I've always wondered how people know just the right thing to write. I thought that maybe they were born knowing how to write.

(Category 4) I never knew that you had to make many drafts, have people proofread them and so on and so forth.

(Category 3) In high school none of the teachers really explained the writing process to us. They basically told us about the thesis statement and the rest we made up as we went along.

(Category 11) I thought the book did a very good job of explaining the parts of the writing process and also what they do. It helped me out a lot and made it easier to read and understand. They broke apart the stories and told us exactly the way they did what they did.

(Category 4) The writing process makes more sense to me know that I read these pages in the book.

(Category 7) Before I was kinda lost as to what all of these words, phrases and sentences were, what they meant and why we used them. I also wondered to myself, if you are writing your own book, story, article, whatever, why do you have to follow a process that somebody else made up?

(Category 4) Now it makes sense that you don't have to follow it exactly, just follow the outline and it will help to improve your writing skills.

Figure A4. Categories.

1. student/teacher classroom behavior
2. student/student relationships
3. background in writing
4. identified learning
5. student/student conflict
6. student/teacher conflict
7. types of questions asked
8. student talk
9. teacher talk
10. attitude toward education
11. attitude toward the classroom
12. attitude toward writing
13. perception of writing ability
14. suggestions to teacher
15. reading ability and attitude
16. definition of writing
17. self-image

Figure A5. Student/student relationships (peer editing groups).

J1 Each person has their own way of writing. Nobody can really say that one persons way is better than anothers because what could be a great writing process for me may not work at all for someone else.

J1 I think that the peer editing is a very good step way to revise an essay. I liked the way that the writer reads his essay out loud to a few other people and they take notes about what they liked about your essay or what confused them about your essay. I think that this will help so that you can change a few things in your essay or add to your essay to make it more clear and less confusing to your audience. I think that most of the time after the changes are made that the writer was able to see their mistakes and felt that it was good changes.

PE1 My group's stories were all great, and I wouldn't mind working with them again.

PE1 I thought the peer editing group was all right. It helped me a little and it didn't seem to hurt. I feel comfortable with them but it won't bother me to change.

PE1 I liked our group. I feel comfortable reading my paper in front of them. I didn't feel like I was being judged in any way. I figured I would have been. All in all, we had a good group. The groups are good because they tell you what you have to fix.

PE1 My group was very supportive and helpful. I liked my group because they gave me new ideas in which to expand on. I would enjoy working with them again. Peer editing is very helpful to me. I enjoy working with people, and my group was very helpful to me.

PE1 The group I had was a very detailed group. They told me what they liked about my story and how I could make it better. I really could be comfortable with these group members. They are a lot of fun. I would like to keep them as a group.

PE1 We all got along really well in our group.

PE1 I liked the group and we seemed to get along okay. They gave me some good ideas for my essay.

PE2 I felt like I had an opinion in the say of what is in a person's paper.

SR3 The audience of my paper is my peers and my teacher.

Figure A6. Research questions outline.

I. How do my perceptions as a writing instructor in a beginning community college composition class compare with my students' perceptions?

1. Body language shows interest and discomfort

A Teacher perceptions
- Baseball caps used to block eye contact (O/FN)
- Whispering does not always mean students aren't paying attention (O/FN)
- Fidgeting common for hands-on students; does not mean they aren't interested (O/FN)
- Lack of eye contact may indicate discomfort in topic or as a student (O/FN)
- Males sometimes rock in chair to call attention to selves (O/FN)
- Females more apt to sit still (O/FN)
- Some students hesitant to shake my hand the first day of class. (O/FN)
- Leaning forward when interested. (O/FN)
- Students sitting in row instead of facing each other in peer editing. (O/FN)
- Students moving chair further from me in conferencing. (O/FN)
- In shaking hands the first day, some students hesitant to grasp my hand. (O/FN)
- Leaning forward when interested. (O/FN)
- Student reading novel during peer editing. (O/FN)
- Students sitting in row instead of facing each other in peer editing. (O/FN)
- Students moving chair further from me in conferenc. (O/FN)
- Looking at book so I don't call on them during discussion. (O/FN)

B Student perceptions
- "Some negative experiences would be listening to the creeps behind me that bug me." (J)
- "I always sit in the last row." (SI)

2. Age may influence behavior, motivation, and attitude.

A. Teacher perceptions
- Older students often more mature, possess higher motivation to succeed, and better use life experiences to assist them. (O/FN)

(figure continues)

- Problems of attendance somewhat related to class of study a younger group (member check).

B. Student perceptions

- Topic of lowering the drinking age emphasizing "so I can have fun with my older friends" seen as persuasive. (SA)

- "The other person in the group wasn't there one day, and when he was he didn't feel comfortable reading his paper. He let me read it--but had to sit somewhere else while I did. I never got to tell him what I thought. I thought he had a good topic, but he needed help expanding and expressing ideas." (About younger student) (PE1)

- "Some girl I can't remember her name was in my group." (written by younger student) (PE1)

- "The day I was here only one person was here out of my group to edit my paper. The other guy wasn't present. I don't wish to be grouped with him again. I don't believe he takes this class seriously. Not to mention papers. I feel he does what's required of him and nothing more. I want someone who is actually going to care what I've written, what my mechanics are like, etc." (about younger student) (PE1)

Figure A7. Category connections.

Research Question 1: How do my perceptions as a writing instructor in a beginning community college composition class compare with my students' perceptions?

1. Body language shows interest and discomfort. (1)
2. Age may influence behavior, motivation, and attitude. (2)
3. The student and teacher have different expectations regarding the importance of attendance. (1)
4. Study skills and habits influence success. (4)
5. People have different experiences and attitudes about writing when they are children vs. adults. (1)
6. Students sometimes need help with selecting topic ideas. (2)
7. Overemphasis on grammar can produce boredom with writing. (4)
8. Students rely on the past to direct attitude and behavior in present situations. (5)
9. Students don't always see themselves as writers. (7)
10. Students obtain many benefits when they utilize the writing process to the fullest, but don't always believe so at first. (6)
11. Students/students or teacher/student working side by side produces more learning. (7)
12. Question/answer techniques can help students think more critically. (4)
13. Groups and individuals approach assignments differently. (5)
14. The importance of smiling may differ, but has a big impact. (3)
15. Students often return lost when they skip class. (4)
16. There's a large amount of preparation time required to set up a class. (3)
17. Importance of organization. (7)
18. Importance of finding voice. (6)
19. Journal vs. diary. (5)
20. Certain teaching approaches may work better for some students or teachers. (4)
21. Students want grade or credit vs. teacher wants them to learn. (5)
22. Testing is a transferable skill. (2)
23. Praising first drafts may provide a false idea of skills. (1)
24. To some students, teacher praise in writing means no revision necessary. (4)
25. Students perceive teacher as sole audience. (7)
26. Expectations of self as student. (17)
27. Only take the course because it's required. (8)
28. Prefer hands-on, means can't do intellectual work. (6)
29. Writing doesn't apply to profession. (10)
30. Don't like homework so don't do it. (10)

(figure continues)

31. Like waiting a few days in a new semester before writing. (5)
32. Writing one document=proficiency. (6)
33. Do a minimum to get by. (13)
34. Influence of family on attitude. (8)
35. A strength of creativity means technical aspects are nonimportant. (3)
36. Shallow journal entries show perceived unimportance of journals. (4)
37. Attendance. (10)
38. Variation in course. (2)
39. Definition of plagairism. (6)
40. Way problems are perceived. (5)
41. High school preparation. (4)
42. Students possess different reasons for attending college. (7)

Research Question 2: How do my students and I understand real and perceived consequences that arise from various views about writing?

1. Animosity toward teacher when students resent talking a class. (1)
2. Males wear baseball hats to avoid eye contact. (2)
3. Hesitant to talk in large group. (3)
4. Discomfort in enrolling in a new school. (3)
5. Many fears about writing. (5)
6. Negative body language. (5)
7. Don't understand assignments or expectations. (4)
8. Evaluation is just from teacher to student. (2)
9. Can't concentrate when have to sit still. (2)
10. Not used to writing for long period of time. (3)
11. Not used to completing long documents. (5)
12. Don't read assignments before class. (6)
13. Might improvise when not prepared, which does not prove successful. (4)
14. Lack of confidence. (10)
15. Initial discomfort with physical proximity with teacher (sitting beside each other). (6)
16. Conferencing perceived as time to cut down student. (8)
17. View selves as major audience and don't strive for understanding by outside readers. (5)
18. Apt to compare selves with others--used to competition. (7)
19. Shallow writing in journals may be sign of apathy. (3)
20. Plagiarism may produce embarrassment in students. (2)
21. Definition of plagairsim. (4)

(figure continues)

22. Failing may result in retaking the class, which causes greater feelings of resentment and embarrassment. (5)
23. Personal problems that weigh heavy produce poor concentration in class. (6)
24. Important to satisfy teacher as well as student needs. (4)
25. Unfair to teacher and rest of class when poor attending students expect extra attention. (6)
26. Students will often write what they're embarrassed or shy to speak. (3)
27. Heavy student or class load produces added stress on students and teachers. (5)
28. Frustration develops when students are unprepared. (8)
29. Teachers disappointed in selves when can't retain students. (2)
30. Student apathy and other negative behavior affects all in class negatively. (14)
31. Outdated teaching methods and low enthusiasm produce boredom. (1)
32. Students wait for teacher to give information. (12)
33. Recognizing weaknesses doesn't always result in motivation to change. (5)
34. Some students won't revise because it's "their story." (4)
35. Students are more aware of their weaknesses than strengths. (3)
36. Negative self-talk. (16)

Research Question 3: How could my students and I mediate or resolve various views about writing?

1. Write to real people to best understand audience. (1)
2. Teacher modeling with own work, favorite techniques, etc. (2)
3. Relate to personal lives and future careers. (2)
4. Students work together to learn about different views. (3)
5. Individual conversations outside class result from personal nature of writing. (3)
6. Use of professional writings as models. (3)
7. Treat students' life stories as valuable. (5)
8. Variety of activities produces mental and physical stimulation. (3)
9. Usefulness of creating techniques to generate ideas. (2)
10. Grammatical mini-lessons completed orally help students learn as a group and make connection with a textbook. (4)
11. Viewing students as individuals, not just class members. (5)
12. Setting patterns in the classroom. (5)
13. Developing trust among classmates. (7)
14. Teacher introducing self to model and let students understand her better. (4)
15. Realize each class is different. (7)
16. Student make-up drives the class culture. (7)
17. By learning students' background, teachers can best help them. (10)

(figure continues)

18. Bring class as a whole to a common goal as well as recognize individual goals. (11)
19. Importance of teacher organization. (7)
20. Teach students how to work in groups. (10)
21. Use positive comments on final drafts instead of just instructional. (3)
22. Possible to open students' minds to new ideas. (11)
23. Lack of confidence is a major consequence in no resolution. (5)
24. Use writing to make sense of personal difficulties. (5)
25. Give students time to adjust to new educational environment. (5)
26. High expectations. (9)
27. Use peer editing groups for support. (4)

Figure A8. Final categories.

I. Students' and teacher's perceptions
    A. Body language
    B. Classroom activities
        1. Attendance
        2. Working collaboratively with peers and the teacher
        3. Question/answer techniques
        4. Differing teaching and learning approaches
        5. Testing as a transferable skill
        6. Expectations of the class and teacher
    C. Influence of past attitudes and behaviors to present educational setting
        1. Family influences
        2. Study skills
        3. Homework
        4. Hands-on versus intellectual activities
        5. High school experiences
    D. Art and craft of writing
        1. Topic selection
        2. Overemphasis of grammar
        3. Benefits of the process approach
        4. Finding voice
        5. Journal versus diary
        6. Creativity
        7. Students viewing themselves as writers
    E. Relationship with the teacher
        1. Teacher preparation
        2. Organization
        3. Teacher as the sole audience
        4. Praise in writing
    F. Goals
        1. Receiving credit for the course versus learning goals
        2. Relationship between writing and profession
        3. Definition of proficiency
        4. Doing a minimum to get by
        5. Self-expectations
II. Consequences
    A. Poor communication
        1. Avoiding eye contact
        2. Evasive body language

(figure continues)

3. Minimal oral discussion
4. Poor attending students expecting extra help

B. Fears and discomfort
1. Lack confidence
2. Different teaching approaches
3. Students waiting for teacher to provide information
4. College different than high school
5. Difficulty concentrating when having to sit still
6. Not used to writing for long periods of time
7. No experience in writing long essays

C. Boredom
1. Term used to mask fears
2. Caused by outdated teaching methods and certain activities

D. Lack of audience consideration
1. Little experience writing lengthy essays
2. Used to completing worksheets instead of writing
3. Use of vague pronouns
4. Believe telling of story the only important aspect

E. Stress
1. Personal problems
2. Heavy class loads for students and teacher
3. Needs not met

F. Animosity toward the teacher
1. Resent composition requirement for major
2. Possess negative feelings toward writing
3. Conference seen as time to cut down students
4. Evaluation a solely from teacher to student

G. Lack of confidence
1. Hesitancy to show teacher writing
2. Lack of eye contact
3. Unwillingness to speak during discussion
4. Discuss weaknesses instead of strengths in writing
5. Negative self-talk

H. Apathy
1. Shallow writing in journals
2. Plagiarism
3. Poor attendance

III. Resolution of various views
A. Modeling

(figure continues)

1. Teacher reading her own writing aloud
2. Teacher demonstrating favorite writing techniques
3. Teacher introducing self
4. Organization
5. Using professional writings
6. Demonstrating effective group techniques

B. Writing connections
1. Relating writing to students' experiences
2. Letters written to peer and international student

C. Developing relationships
1. Treating students' life stories as valuable
2. Treating students as individuals
3. Let student make-up drive the class culture
4. Learning background of students
5. Using positive comments on final drafts

D. Collaboration
1. Use of small student groups
2. Teacher/student conferences
3. Individual conversations outside class
4. Develop sense of trust
5. Increased confidence

E. Varied activities
1. Mental and physical stimulation
2. Creating techniques to stimulate ideas
3. Mini-lessons to give more confidence
4. Set patterns in the class

F. Goal setting
1. For the class as a whole as well as individual
2. Use writing to solve personal problems
3. High expectations
4. Opened minds to new ideas